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THE ROLE OF IMPERIAL DECREES IN EZRA-NEHEMIAH: An ideological and exegetical analysis.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an ideological and exegetical analysis of the role of the imperial decrees of Persia in Ezra-Nehemiah (hereafter E-N).

The imperial decrees, to date, have not been considered to play any significant role in both the compilation and the interpretation of E-N because they have been analysed, almost exclusively, in terms of their literary form and character and not in terms of their political-ideological function within the E-N narrative. Consequently, an alternative approach to the E-N text seemed necessary. This study develops a literary-ideological methodological paradigm which has its primary interest in the ideological character and function of a text; a mode of reading the text which gives expression to the nexus of political ideology and religio-cultural (*i.e. theological*) concerns within a single narrative complex, such as E-N. Thus, matters relative to politics, power, and ideology, and the manner in which they are imprinted on the production of a text, become extremely important.

The application of this methodology to E-N yields two conclusions which need special mention. One conclusion is that the imperial decrees, on a literary-structural level, function as the organising centre for the tri-partite narrative design of E-N. In fact, this work demonstrates that the imperial decrees, not only drive the literary production of E-N, but also provide the narrative its ideological cohesion. The second conclusion of this study is that the imperial decrees, more than any other aspect of E-N, facilitates an adequate decoding of the political and conflict discourse inherent in

E-N.

By refocusing E-N research toward an appreciation of the centrality of the decrees, the dissertation brings into focus, rather sharply, the symbiotic relationship between official Persian colonial documents on the one hand, and the religio-cultural text of E-N, on the other, by demonstrating that there exists a dialectical relationship between the imperial decrees, and the E-N narrative in which they are set. The religio-cultural text, E-N, lends religio-cultural legitimacy to the political decrees of the colonial empire, Persia, while the imperial decrees in turn provide political, military and economic authority and legitimacy to the Golah-led reconstruction of post-Babylonian Palestine. Such a symbiotic relationship illustrates the ideological collusion of the E-N text with Persian colonial ideology.

Finally, this study, by virtue of its focus on the role of the imperial decrees in E-N, lays the necessary foundation for further and more in depth exegetical analyses of the E-N literature in terms of an appreciation for those forces (e.g. political, ideological, religious, economic, cultural) which impact its literary production in the context of Persian colonial domination.

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I have met a few persons who wish to redefine the purpose for writing doctoral

dissertations as a sophisticated exercise in longsuffering and endurance as opposed to academic creativity and potential. Of all the stages of writing that I have been alerted to, it was certainly the final few weeks just prior to submission that are the most arduous. This is the moment that one discovers what it is that you were really supposed to be writing about and not the 300 or so pages that presently is sitting on several backup discs safely stored in at least seven different places. It is at this moment more than ever that one needs a voice of reassurance and solidarity. For me, that voice was my friend and colleague, Rev Paul Germond. Thank you for your listening ear and your valuable critical comments just prior to the submission of this work.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AUSS	Andrews University Seminar Studies
BASOR	The Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
Bib	Biblica
BR	Biblical Research
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
HBT	Horisons in Biblical Theology
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
HTS	Harvard Theological Series
IDB	Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible
IDBSup	Supplementary Volume to Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JPOS	Journal of Palestine Oriental Society
JsemStud	Journal of Semitic Studies
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSOTSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
JTSA	Journal of Theology for Southern Africa
LexTQ	Lexington Theological Quarterly
OLZ	Orientalische Literaturzeitung
OTE	Old Testament Essays
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
UNISA	University of South Africa
VT	Vetus Testamentum
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
ZAW	Zeitschrift für alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

Biblical books

2 Chron	2 Chronicles	Isa	Isaiah
Dan	Daniel	Jer	Jeremiah
Es	Esther	Lam	Lamenations
Ex	Exodus	Neh	Nehemiah
Ez	Ezra		

Other abbreviations

NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
B.C.E.	Before the Common Era
BDB	Brown, Driver, Briggs - *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon Press (1979).

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INTRODUCTION

0.1 AIM

The aim of this study can be briefly stated as follows:

> ***An ideological and exegetical analysis of the imperial decrees in Ezra-Nehemiah, locating such an analysis with the wider political and economic context of early Second Temple Palestine.***

This study aims to make explicit the relationship between the imperial decrees of Persia and the recreation of a new Jewish identity (politically and religiously) in Jerusalem-Judah during the Second Temple period. The imperial decrees identified by this study include: the decrees of Cyrus [Ez 1:2-4; 6:3-5], the decrees of Artaxerxes [Ez 4:17-23; 7:12-26; Neh 2:7-9], and the decree of Darius [Ez 6:6-12] (*See Tables 1-4 at the end of this Introduction for the working translations of the decrees*).

This study contends that the Jewish deportees returning from Babylon would never have been able to resettle and reassert their authority in Judah if they had not enjoyed the political and ideological support of Persia during the resettlement period. This kind of support is most clearly demonstrated by a series of imperial decrees which Persia had willingly proclaimed in favour of the deportees. It is, then, not unreasonable to consider that the imperial decrees of Persia, more than any other factor, provide the Ezra-Nehemiah *(hereafter E-N)* literature its narrative cohesion both on a literary and an ideological level. The dominant mode of E-N scholarship, however, has not yet reflected any acknowledgement or awareness of the significant role of the imperial decrees within the context of exegesis and ideological analysis of

the E-N literature. If the resettlement of the Jewish deportees from Babylon was in fact fundamentally dependent upon the imperial decrees of Persia, then an analysis of the role of the imperial decrees within the broader context of the E-N literature would be necessary if only to be able better to understand the interplay of politics, religion and ideology during the Second Temple period and, indeed, within the E-N text itself.

The dominant mode of research *vis-a-vis* E-N studies has yet to interpret E-N by using the Persian decrees as the primary hermeneutical-interpretive grid. Instead, the majority of E-N scholarship has assumed a *theological* interpretive matrix of meaning for this literature. The theological categories through which E-N have been interpreted have largely been theological-thematic categories, such as retribution, the Chronicler's attitude to other inhabitants of the land, and Davidic monarchy (*see* Braun 1979:63). These *theological-thematic* categories are limited in terms of the variety of meanings which can be extracted from the E-N literature. The limitations of a theological-thematic approach become evident when the exegete asks questions about class-conflict and ideological warfare in the E-N text.

This study of the E-N literature, and more specifically the imperial decrees, will reveal the presence of a bitter ideological battle between various factions as they compete for control of Jerusalem-Judah during the Second Temple period. These factions are stereotyped in the text as two major groups: on the one hand are the returning expatriates, among others called the *sons of the exile/Golah* [בני־הגולה], and, on the

other hand are the people whom the Golah encounter as they reenter the land. They are characterised as *enemies* of the Golah and are, among others, collectively called the *people of the land* [עם־הארץ].

It is argued here that a literary-ideological reading, more than any other method of reading E-N, exposes two things in particular. First, the struggles between these factions, as they try to resolve the question of which of the two groups will ultimately control the land and resources of Jerusalem-Judah during the Second Temple Period, are brought out. Second, such a reading strategy exposes the way in which the literary structure of the text is anchored in and structured around the imperial decrees of Persia.

A lesson from history is that the transfer of political and economic power from one group to another (especially from one ruling class to an incoming and totally different ruling class) is often accompanied by intense *ideological warfare* and, frequently, military confrontation. The E-N text, while not explicit concerning military confrontation, does certainly reflect ideological warfare. However, in order to bring to the surface the ideological warfare embedded in the E-N text, the exegete needs a methodology that will move the analysis beyond the traditional theological-thematic paradigm which does not answer questions of ideological battle. In fact, as will be demonstrated below, such a paradigm is ill-equipped to address sociologically-oriented concerns such as power, social class and ideological warfare. The exegete

needs an approach which will be able to decode the E-N discourse to make explicit its ideological content and orientation. This study is an attempt to provide such a methodological paradigm and, in so doing, to make explicit the ideological elements of the E-N narrative. In the process of doing this, the exegete will need to move beyond or, more accurately, *behind*, the text. The exegete will need to come to terms with the impact of the political and economic forces which facilitate the emergence of the *dominant* models of Jewish piety which emerged during the Second Temple period. For indeed, behind the dominant models of piety personified in leaders such as Ezra and Nehemiah lie powerful political, economic and ideological forces. On many levels E-N studies have not explicitly recognised or taken into account these factors.

It has only been since the late eighties that biblical scholarship has taken seriously the fact that political and economic power and religion are not only inseparable, but that in fact, such social forces as politics and economics to a large degree determine the character of religious piety. A Western-dominated and Northern-Hemisphere-oriented world of biblical scholarship is only now affirming that, in the ancient Near Eastern context, there was no real differentiation between politics and religion (Horsley 1991:163). Assuming this premise, the E-N text need not remain shackled to the dominance of the theological-thematic paradigm.

This study therefore aims, with the use of a literary-ideological paradigm, to analyse the imperial decrees in E-N with a view to making explicit the issues of power,

politics and ideology signified by the text.

0.2 OUTLINE OF STUDY

This study has three major parts. The focus of Part 1 is the history of research in E-N studies with an emphasis on the methodological paradigms which have informed E-N scholarship to date. Such an overview will make explicit the methodological stalemate which currently plagues E-N studies, as well as proposing a way out of the stalemate: a *literary-ideological* approach to the study of the imperial decrees. This study is undertaken from the black experience of the Bible in South Africa. The literary-ideological method proposed here intends to provide an exegetical analytical framework which would liberate the biblical text from its slavery to exegetical models which muzzle its meaning and potential contemporary significance. It is therefore necessary to make explicit the *literary-ideological* approach within the broader context and crisis of biblical interpretation in South Africa.

Part 2 of this study is an analysis of the discourse which undergirds the imperial decrees themselves. The interest here is essentially the politics of language with an emphasis on trying to understand not only what is said and by whom, but what is not said and why. The focus here will also include an analysis of the literary structure and ideological character of E-N in general. An important element of the analysis in this part of the study is Chapter 7, which outlines a plausible hypothesis *vis-a-vis* the material conditions which undergird the promulgation of the Persian imperial decrees.

Part 3, will serve as a conclusion to this study. It summarises the major results of this investigation and measures these against the hypotheses which this study sets out to test. In addition, Part 3 attempts to move the study beyond its defined parameters, outlining the implications of the analysis as it relates to the nexus of politics, power, ideology and literary production.

A bibliography of cited works follows the three major sections as well as a listing of the various tables and charts arising out of the analysis of E-N.

0.3 AN ORIENTATION TO THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF EZRA-NEHEMIAH

***Returning to ancestral land*:** The E-N literature narrates the processes whereby groups of deported Jews, over a period of time, together with their descendants, returned from Babylonia to Palestine, the land of their ancestral heritage. E-N can be described further as a narrative which retells how various groups of deportees not only returned to their ancestral land, but aggressively reestablished their religio-cultural hegemony in the homeland, namely Jerusalem-Judah.

The returning expatriates, more accurately described as former aristocrats of Judah-Jerusalem, together with their descendants, resumed their former positions of political and religious power within Judah-Jerusalem, but not without encountering strong opposition from the *people of the land* [עם־הארץ]. The E-N text reflects some of the

dynamics of the ensuing struggle. However, the way in which the E-N literature was compiled suggests that such struggles were considered to be of secondary importance. The primary focus, at least for the compilers of the E-N text, it seems, was the successful completion of the Persian-sponsored temple-building project and the redefinition of the character of Jewish national culture - a culture which did not undermine Persian colonial hegemony.

The reestablishment of Jerusalem-Judah during the Persian period would have been impossible if it were not for the imperial decrees issued by various Persian kings throughout the period of national reconstruction, i.e. during the Second Temple period. It is the role of the imperial decrees in the process of the reconstruction and development of Jerusalem-Judah which is the primary focus of this study.

The compilers of the E-N literature, in recording the various phases of the reconstruction and development programme of the Jewish community in Palestine during the Second Temple period, make use of Persian imperial decrees as a means of narrative orientation. In other words, the claim here is that the organising principle of the E-N literature is the imperial decrees. Japhet (1994) has recently argued for a more historiographically-based organising principle for the E-N literature. Her position is not accepted here and will be critiqued in more detail below. This study will show that, in addition to the E-N narrative being told along Persian historiographical lines, the literary structure of the text clearly indicates that the imperial decrees provide the

ideological orientation. The narrative commences with the imperial decree made by King Cyrus in 538 B.C.E. (Ez 1:1-4 cf.6:3-5) which facilitates the initial repatriation to Palestine of Jews previously deported by King *Nebuchadrezzar and the Babylonian regime. [**Nebuchadrezzar, as in Jer 21:2,7; 22:25; 24:1, etc., is a nearer approach to the correct spelling of the Babylonian **Nabu-kudurri-usur** than is Nebuchad**n**ezzar (i.e.* נבוכדראצר *, and incorrectly* נבוכדנאצר *. - see BDB 613*]. E-N continues to outline, in similar fashion, subsequent imperial decrees made by King Artaxerxes and King Darius and to show how they, in turn, also facilitate both the repatriation of former residents and their descendants to Jerusalem-Judah and the completion of the temple.

It would be short-sighted to see the function of the imperial decrees as that of merely facilitating the physical return of formerly deported Jews to their ancestral homeland. The imperial decrees issued by the Persian colonial regime, in addition, provided Jewish expatriates with the necessary political and ideological legitimacy they needed so as to reestablish their former ruling-class status in Palestine, the land they once had occupied. Possession of the social-class status of former ruling-class facilitated the process whereby descendants reclaimed and reinforced their control on their reentry into the land they had occupied prior to their expulsion from Palestine by the Babylonian regime in 597 & 587/6 B.C.E.

A literary-ideological reading of the imperial decrees will make explicit the

implications of Persia's ongoing economic and logistical support for the returning expatriates. Persia's economic and logistical support for the rebuilding of Jerusalem-Judah had far-reaching consequences in terms of creating an economically and politically stable region called the province Beyond the River. The Persian sponsorship of the reconstruction and development of Jerusalem-Judah had even further consequences for the future religio-cultural and socio-political character of Jewish life.

It is therefore crucial that any exegetical analysis of the reconstruction and development of Palestine during the Persian colonial period take into account the vital role played by the imperial decrees of Persia during the period. The movement of expatriates from the Diaspora (Babylonia in particular) towards Jerusalem, the ideological nerve centre of Second Temple Judah, is thus best understood when viewed, hermeneutically, through the lens of the imperial decrees.

The promise of such a hermeneutical grid for reading the E-N narrative is that the literary and ideological character of E-N becomes more explicit than in other hermeneutical approaches. It becomes obvious that each of the phases of repatriation is predicated upon an imperial decree. In other words, each movement of expatriates from the Diaspora toward their ancestral homeland is explicitly facilitated by an imperial decree. The first phase of repatriation is facilitated by the decree of King Cyrus (Ez 1:2-4 cf.6:3-5). The decree enables expatriate leaders such as Sheshbazzar

and, later, Zerubbabel, together with Jeshua, the high priest, to return and rebuild the house of God at Jerusalem in Judah:

(Ez 1:3b) ויבן את־בית יהוה אלהי ישראל הוא האלהים אשר בירושלם:

Translation: *... and rebuild the house of YHWH, the God of Israel - He is the God who is in Jerusalem.*

The decrees of Artaxerxes are quoted as facilitating the return of a subsequent group led by Ezra (*see* Ezra 7). Another decree by King Artaxerxes (the same Persian King?) is quoted as enabling the repatriation of a separate group led by Nehemiah (*see* Nehemiah 2). The decree of Darius (*see* Ezra 6), on the other hand, is quoted in the context of permitting the resumption of the reconstruction and development programme which had been halted due to political upheaval, and the completion of the temple. The imperial decrees, though issued at different times, are all quoted within the framework of facilitating the reconstruction and development of Jerusalem-Judah during the Second Temple period.

An immediate result of reading the E-N literature through the hermeneutical lens of the imperial decrees is that the ideological agenda of the literature comes sharply into focus. The E-N literature does not pretend to record the experience of *all* Diaspora Jews returning to their ancestral land. On the contrary! The E-N narrative retells the story of national reconstruction from *one* particular ideological perspective, being very clear in the socio-cultural identification of the narrative focus and bias, namely, the interests of those whom King Nebuchadrezzar had carried captive to Babylon (*see* Ez 2:1) Furthermore, repatriation depended upon the ability to demonstrate some sort of

credible genealogical heritage. Not all the returnees were able to do this initially (*see* Ez 2:59f). The inability to demonstrate genealogical heritage was overcome, later, by the opportunity of ideological as opposed to genealogical assimilation into the community of the Golah. The Cyrus decree, which introduces the E-N literature, is very specific in regard to its focus. The decree identified the survivors of Babylonian deportation (Ez 1:4) and enabled them to return to their ancestral land. Furthermore, the imperial decree of Cyrus stated clearly that the primary destination of the returning community was to be Jerusalem in Judah (Ez 1:2). The motivation on the part of the colonial power, it seems, was to facilitate the rebuilding of the former ideological nerve-centre of Palestine, which in turn would serve the strategic, political, economic and military interests of Persia.

It is important to underline that the E-N literature must not be assumed to reflect the entire Jewish experience for the period. This is so even though E-N is our principal biblical source for the religio-cultural history of the Jews in Syria-Palestine (more particularly Judah) during the Persian colonial period (539-332 B.C.E.). We need to bear in mind that E-N:

> ...covers only the first and last quarter of the first of these two centuries [539-332 B.C.E.], and the information which it offers is refracted through several interpretive and ideological prisms ([brackets mine] Blenkinsopp 1991b:22).

Scholars are agreed that the E-N narrative is a complex compilation drawing from a vast array of sources, characters, ideas and events, creatively assembled into a more or

less coherent narrative (Williamson 1987a:14-34). A problem that emerges as a result of such a compilation is the status and quality accorded to the sources and characters which constitute this seemingly coherent narrative (*see* Grabbe 1991). The literary status one accords these sources has a direct bearing on how one constructs a social history of the Jews for this period, as well as how one interprets the literary-ideological function of the imperial decrees in the E-N literature.

There are, no doubt, numerous unresolved literary and historical problems plaguing E-N (*see* e.g. Mallau 1988; Japhet 1994) which have resulted in a near deadlock in E-N studies. A literary-ideological paradigm, at the same time that it takes cognisance of the inherent problems of the E-N text, will move the exegete *behind* the text so as to appreciate the ideology which undergirds the repatriation of Jewish deportees from Babylon to their ancestral land during the Second Temple period. The focus on ideology as opposed to the unresolved historical and literary problems promises to move E-N out of its deadlock status.

***No 'EMPTY' land*:** A significant aspect of the story of repatriation of Jews during the Persian colonial era is that the expatriates did not return from Babylonia to an *empty* Judean land (Japhet 1983b; Carroll 1992b). On their return to the land of their ancestors, the former Babylonian exiles encountered a class of people who are included in the descriptive title *people of the land* [עם־הארץ] (*see Chapter 5 & 6 below for a more detailed analysis of the terminology*). Some of the people of the land

had no experience of Babylonian deportation while others were repatriated at an earlier date from areas such as Assyria. With the possible exception of the former Assyrian deportees, it is likely that the vast majority of the *people of the land* were peasants who were too poor to be of any administrative and technical use to a colonial power such as Babylon or Assyria (2 Kings 25:12, Jer 52:16, Graham 1984). Therefore, they were not deported and consequently could not draw on a socio-political heritage of Babylonian or Assyrian political banishment. The ability to prove one's colonization became an important prerequisite in terms of developing Jewish identity in the Second Temple period. In other words, the socio-cultural identity of a Jew in the Second Temple period was dependant upon the ability to prove an exilic identity either by genealogical record or ideological assimilation into the congregation of the Golah [מקהל הגולה] (Ez 10:8). The opportunity for ideological assimilation was created during the mission of Ezra. It is here that Jewish males were accorded the opportunity to be reintegrated into the congregation of the Golah if they denounced their marriages to foreign women. However, even such an opportunity was confined to those who had already been identified as the Golah. The implication is that the vast majority of Jews who were not exiled were never accorded an opportunity to reintegrate or be a part of Jewish identity in the Second Temple period. Instead, they were classified along with the Samaritan-based Persian government officials as constituting the *people of the land* [עם־הארץ]. Since the vast majority of the עם־הארץ, by virtue of their class status, were unable to prove Babylonian banishment they were marginalised by the incoming Persian-sponsored expatriates. It is little

wonder that עם־הארץ was synonymous with being classified enemies of Judah [צרי יהודה] (Ez 4:1).

It is not surprising, then, that in the process of Persian-sponsored repatriation an ideological struggle emerged between the עם־הארץ and the Babylonian exiles who returned to the land to engage in the reconstruction and development of Jerusalem-Judah. The Persian-sponsored programme of resettlement in the land, religio-cultural redefinition and the economic restructuring of Jerusalem-Judah triggered off a battle for the soul of Jewish identity, not only during the Persian period, but also beyond. A brief comment about this ideological battle may be in order at this point.

Babylonian colonial policy meant the deportation of the elite of society and the redistribution of their land. One could assume that conflict, especially over land claims, was therefore a foregone conclusion when this banished elite returned and resettled in their ancestral land. The land they had formerly owned and controlled was now controlled by a socio-political combination of lower-class Jews and a Samaritan-based ruling elite. The extent to which Samaria, the administrative capital for the Palestine region, exercised its political and economic control over the residents of Jerusalem-Judah prior to the arrival of the expatriates from Babylon, is uncertain. Nevertheless, a power struggle was to be expected between the people of the land and those returning to the land - a struggle to establish legitimacy in control over the land resource.

Interestingly, the literary-ideological framework of the E-N narrative is *silent* as to any debate concerning land claims. This does not mean that there no struggles concerning matters around the land issue and the resettlement process. However, an analysis of the form and content of the E-N literature shows how the compilers of the text incorporate issues around land settlement within the rubric of a larger and more complex ideological warfare. The nerve centre of the ideological warfare revolves around the identity and legitimacy of who is permitted (and by what criteria) to participate in the programme of national reconstruction and development of Jerusalem-Judah during the early Second Temple period. This is why the E-N gives the impression that the resettlement of the former deportees in their former ancestral homeland, posed no geographical or ideological problems (*see* Ez 2:70).

0.4 NATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION

Contextual Theology: The period of Persian-sponsored reconstruction and development of Jerusalem-Judah during the Second Temple period was accompanied by religious and cultural destabilisation within Jerusalem-Judah, graphically portrayed in Ezra 1-6 (cf.Nehemiah 5). The reinstatement of the powers and privileges of the expatriates, whom the text describes as the Golah, did not go unchallenged by those who felt left out of the emerging new alliances and allegiances. A process of political bargaining and power-broking finally enabled the former banished Judean elite to secure political guarantees from the Persian government. The imperial decrees are explicit; they ensured that the Babylonian exiles remained in power both politically

and religiously.

The guarantees secured from Persia thus facilitated and legitimised the expatriates' interpretation of the religio-cultural heritage of their ancestors. For example, the content of the *Torah of Moses* [תורת משה] (Ez 7:6; Neh 8:1) which Ezra brought with him from the Persian court is alluded to but never directly quoted as a document bearing ultimate authority. Ultimate *biblical* authority was vested in a class of biblical interpreters which emerge during this period, namely Ezra and his priests and scribes (Neh 8:7-8). It is they, alone, who provided the authoritative sense of meaning to the content of the law. The text is abundantly clear in this regard:

(Neh 8:8) ויקראו בספר בתורת האלהים מפרש ושום שכל ויבינו במקרא׃

Translation: *And they read aloud from the book of the law of God - with interpretation. And they set forth the sense so that the people understood the reading.*

The content and authority of the law is thus open to being redefined. It is more than likely that Persia adopted, in principle, a mandate that the *Mosaic* law would serve as the *civil* law which governed Jerusalem-Judah.

Scholars tend to assume that the *Torah of Moses* referred to in E-N is probably the Pentateuch as we presently have in Masoretic canonical form. The lack of evidence suggests that this must, however, remain a conjecture. What is of prime importance, explicitly revealed by the E-N text itself, is the process and results of a contextualisation of the content of the *Torah of Moses*. We have already mentioned

the subtle shift of authority from the *written* law to the *interpreted* law. The shift can be cautiously described as laying the foundation for the contextual interpretation of scripture. It needs to be said that not all *contextual* interpretations should necessarily be considered liberating. The intermarriage débâcle is a classic case in point. While modern twentieth century exegesis may view with disdain the stringent measures taken by the Ezra community, it is clear that the Ezra community itself found this to be a liberating event - at least for those males who as a result of divorcing their foreign wives were reintegrated into the congregation of the exiles.

The political guarantees granted by Persia through the imperial decrees ensured that the Golah alone were permitted to interpret and contextualise the *law* which regulated the lives of the Jews (Neh 8:8). In addition, the decrees ensured that only the Golah were allowed the exclusive right to build what represented the central national ideological symbol, the temple. As a consequence, Persian legitimation of the Golah also facilitated a cultural reformation by allowing one favoured group to define the cultural basis whereby people qualified for membership to the newly-defined Jewish community in Jerusalem-Judah. Furthermore, the community of Babylonian exiles, via the mission of Nehemiah, were also granted the exclusive right to dictate the restructuring of the national economy.

In sum, Persian support of the returning exiles amounted to a Persian-sponsored cultural, political and economic reformation in Judah. Such imperial sponsorship was

guaranteed by means of imperial decrees and facilitated by a contextual reading of the Torah of Moses.

The Persian sponsorship of the Second Temple programme of national reconstruction had far-reaching socio-political, spiritual-ideological and religio-cultural consequences. One such consequence, for example, was the radical exclusion of many of the people of Judah-Jerusalem from effective citizenship in the newly defined nation-state or, to borrow Joel Weinberg's (1976, 1992) terminology, exclusion from the *Bürger-Tempel-Gemeinde* (citizen-temple community).

The political agenda of Persia: A major complicating factor for the modern exegete of the E-N text is the **silence** of the text in terms of the socio-political motivations of Persia *vis-a-vis* the reconstruction and development plans of Ezra and Nehemiah. The tendency among biblical scholars is to confine the debate to the internal *theological* issues as signified by the text. The result is that we end up with a discussion exclusively focused on the theological issues in E-N without reference to a plausible socio-political context which must have influenced the context at the time. In other words, we cannot assume an arbitrary or solely internal explanation for the missions of Ezra and Nehemiah. Persian sponsorship of the returning exilic community in terms of economic support and political legitimacy is both obvious and explicit.

Hoglund (1992) points out that the sudden internal restructuring of the Judean

community only makes sense in relation to the political agenda of Persia in national-religious history. The challenge, according to Hoglund, is to make a case for a plausible historical-political scenario in which the missions of Ezra and Nehemiah, indeed, the Persian sponsorship of national reconstruction in Judah, in general, can be understood. Hoglund's hypothesis is accepted here as the most plausible of theories advanced to date. In sum, Hoglund argues that it was in Persia's interest to tighten imperial control over the Levant, especially in the face of rising Egyptian and Greek threats and challenges to Persian imperialism. The missions of Ezra and Nehemiah must therefore be seen as part of the grand schema of Persia to control the entire area West of the Euphrates.

***Decoding the discourse of E-N*:** The E-N text, as mentioned above, has been interpreted by scholars mainly in terms of a theological paradigm. This study will argue that the discourse of E-N can be decoded in such a way as to make explicit its political and ideological character. This study will go one stage further and argue that the E-N literature, while silent on the Persian political agenda for Judah, reflects, through its silence and by its very literary structure, collaboration with the ideological agenda of Persia. It is here that theology probably becomes ideology: where *political power* is used to legitimise what might otherwise be classified as *theology*. It is therefore too simplistic to confine our analysis to the internal *theological* disputes of the restoration community in Judah. The exegete simply cannot ignore the interplay of politics, power and ideology in the formation of culture or indeed, of a literary text. In

attending to the interplay, we may be able to correct the imbalance created by an exegesis of E-N which ignores social-scientifically-oriented issues such as politics, ideology and economics. It is simply too simplistic to conclude that the commonalities in the religious outlook of Persia (Zoroastrianism) and Israel (Judaism) facilitated a harmonious working-together, with the subsequent birth of a new post-Babylonian Israel (*contra* Smith 1971). What this study will demonstrate is that the character of the *new* post-Babylonian Israel was directly facilitated, if not dictated, by the political and economic interests of Persia as it sought to consolidate and extend its hegemony in the ancient Near East. This is demonstrated by an analysis of the imperial decrees in E-N in terms of its ideological character and in terms of the literary structure of the E-N text itself. It is only thus that the exegete will be able to move beyond, indeed behind, a purely theological-thematic reading of E-N.

0.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Presuppositions: A fundamental presupposition guiding this study is that the structure of the E-N text itself signifies its ideological orientation. It is accepted here that it is possible for the exegete to make explicit both the conscious and unconscious political and ideological agenda(s) of the E-N text by examining, among other factors, the structure of the text. In so doing, it will be demonstrated that E-N is in collusion with the imperial politics of the time.

Exegetical method: The foregoing understanding of the content and orientation of the

E-N literature presupposes an exegetical method which takes seriously the nexus between politics, power, ideology and literature. This study develops a paradigm, here called a *literary-ideological paradigm*, which reflects a sensitivity to issues of power and ideology in the biblical text. It is this paradigm that enables the exegete to investigate those mechanisms whereby an exiled elite, the Babylonian exiles, were able to reestablish their religio-cultural hegemony in the land of their ancestors. The exegete is also able to pose questions regarding the responses of the people of the land toward the exiles who were probably none other than neo-Persian imperialists.

A *literary-ideological mode of reading* the E-N literature promises to be an appropriate model for illuminating matters of politics, power, ideology and literary creativity which are embedded in the E-N text.

Working hypotheses: In view of the above-mentioned discussion the working hypotheses of this study can be stated in the following manner:

1. *The literary structure of the E-N text signifies the centrality of the imperial (Persian) decrees explicitly referred to in the E-N text.*

2. *The dominant ideological agenda of the E-N text is a reflection and an extension of Persian hegemony in the province Beyond the River which included Judah and Jerusalem.*

3. *The religio-cultural discourse of E-N reflects a convergence of ideological interests; that of the returning Jews (Golah) to Palestine and that of the Persian regime who facilitated such a return of Jews to Palestine. On the one hand the returning Jews (former deportees) were solely interested in reestablishing their religious and cultural hegemony in Jerusalem-Judah. On*

the other hand, the Persian imperial regime could not be disinterested in matters such as the political stability of Palestine, one of its most strategically located colonial provinces.

4. *The returning exiles would have experienced much greater difficulty to resettle and reassert their authority in Judah without the political and economic support of Persia as well as the ideological legitimation which Persia granted in the form of imperial decrees.*

In demonstrating the centrality of the Persian decrees in the structure of the E-N text, this study hopes to make explicit the interlocking functions of these decrees on the level of politics, power, ideology and literary production, in the E-N text.

0.6 SUMMARY

The foregoing discussion raises many issues of which two will impact significantly on the orientation of this study. The only way whereby the returning exiles could successfully reassert their religio-cultural hegemony in Judah was by securing authoritative support from the Persian crown. The support manifested itself through Persia's issuing of imperial decrees which legitimised the returning Babylonian exilic community. Without official legitimation and collaboration, not forgetting the Persian financial-aid package written into such decrees, the returnees would never have been able to regain control over Judah. We are examining an issue which is primarily related to political power and ideological support. Strict *religious* interests are only secondary in this instance.

In addition, the E-N text *spiritualises* and legitimises the overt political, ideological

and economic support from Persia. The result is that the radical class conflicts within the text are assumed to be strictly theological differences between the returnees and those whom they encounter on their return to the land. The compilers creatively retell the process of repatriation and rebuilding of Israel in a *theological* discursive mode. Decoding the discourse of the compilers therefore becomes a necessary exegetical exercise in order to appreciate the ideological nature of the struggle between those returning to the land of their ancestors and their fellow Jewish compatriots who were either never exiled at all, or if exiled, were certainly not exiled to Babylon.

Such considerations underline the importance of an analysis of the imperial decrees in E-N. An analysis of these decrees will reveal issues of political power and ideological warfare masked by theological discourse. E-N can therefore be understood as a document which is fundamentally political in character, requiring a critical ideological analysis.

0.7 TRANSLATION TABLES

The intention of the textual commentary accompanying each translation, below, is not to be exhaustive, but rather to provide literary-ideological orientation. For more detailed traditional historical-critical textual commentary consult Batten (1913); Bickerman (1946); Jerusalmi (1978); Blenkinsopp (1988); Williamson (1985).

TABLE 1a - *IMPERIAL DECREES*

DECREE OF CYRUS
EZRA 1:2-4

TRANSLATION
(v.1.) In the [a]first year[a] of Cyrus, king of Persia ... YHWH aroused the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, so that he issued a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing, saying: *(v.2.) Thus says Cyrus, king of Persia: YHWH, [b]the **God of Heaven**,[b] has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has appointed me to [c]build him a **house**[c] in Jerusalem which is in Judah. (v.3.) Any of those among you who are of his people - may their God be with them - are now permitted to go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and rebuild the [d]**house of YHWH**, the God of Israel[d] - [e]he is the God who is in Jerusalem.[e] (v.4.) And let all survivors in whatever place they reside, be assisted by the people of their place with silver and gold, with goods and with animals, besides freewill offerings for the [f]**house of God which is in Jerusalem**[f].*

SOME TEXTUAL OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS

[a-a] בשנת אחת [cf.Ez 6:3] The date, here, refers to the first year of Persian hegemony over Babylon in 538 B.C.E. - not the first year for Cyrus as king of the Persian Empire, *viz.*, 557 B.C.E. (Myers 1965:6; Blenkinsopp 1988:74).

[b-b] אלהי השמים [cf.Ez 6:9,10; 7:12, 21, 23]. This is a common postexilic expression found frequently in the Elephantine correspondence (Myers 1965:4). It is also used in official documents and when Jews are dealing with Gentiles, e.g., Ez 5:12; Jonah 1:9 (Blenkinsopp 1988:75).

[c-c] לבנות־לו בית - In v.3., this expression is expanded elaborately. See comments below for [d-d].

[d-d] בית יהוה אלהי ישראל - This is an intensified spiritual-ideological focus and development of the phrase in v.2., *'the house in Jerusalem'*. The literary expansion is twofold: Jerusalem is unmistakably portrayed as the new religio-cultural centre for Second Temple Jewish life, as well as the exclusive residence of YHWH, the God who is in Jerusalem.

[e-e] הוא האלהים אשר בירושלם - This is a standard title for God in the Aramaic section (Ez 4:24; 5:2,6,17; 6:3,12,18; 7:16,17,19.

[f-f] לבית האלהים אשר בירושלם - See comments above for [d-d].

Material support (v.4): Blenkinsopp (1988:75) notes that it is historically implausible that the entire population provided material support for the Golah. One's interpretation is, of course, largely contingent upon the assessment of the Hebrew decree as compared to the Aramaic version in Ezra 6.

Exodus tradition: The decree reflects many allusions to the exodus tradition which provide a kind of deep structure to the history of this new beginning for Israel (Blenkinsopp 1988:76; Throntveit 1992:16-20). The kind of allusions noted reinforces the hypothesis of the Jewish character and origin of the decree even though a surface reading states, explicitly, that the decree, as it stands is a Persian decree promulgated by King Cyrus.

TABLE 1b - *IMPERIAL DECREES*

DECREE OF CYRUS
EZRA 6:2b-5

TRANSLATION
(v.1) Then King Darius made a decree, and they searched in the archives where the treasures were stored, there in Babylon ... *(v.2b.) [a]Memorandum:[a] (v.3.) [b]In the first year of his reign[b], King Cyrus made a* ***decree.*** *Concerning the [c]**house of God** at Jerusalem[c], let the **house** be rebuilt, the place where [d]sacrifices are sacrificed and burnt offerings are offered[d]: its height shall be sixty cubits and its width sixty cubits (v.4.) with three layers of hewn stones and one layer of timber: let the expenses be given from the [e]royal treasury[e] (v.5.) Also, let the gold and silver vessels of the **house of God** which Nebuchadrezzar took out of the [f]**temple** in Jerusalem[f] and brought to Babylon, be restored and brought back to the **temple** in Jerusalem, each to its place; you shall put them in the [g]**house of God**.[g]*

SOME TEXTUAL OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS

[a-a] דכרונה is an official oral decree or decision (Myers 1965:49) and belongs to the same class of official Persian documents (Bickerman 1946:251).

[b-b] בשנת חדה לכורש מלכא כורש מלכא [See note above for Ez 1:1].

[c-c] בת־אלהא בירושלם - concerning the house of God at Jerusalem [See comment d-d for Ez 1:24].

[d-d] ד־דבחין דבחין ואשוהי מסובלין - Myers (1965:47) translates this expression with: "Let the house where sacrifices are offered be reconstructed and its foundations retained." Blenkinsopp (1988:123), and similarly the NRSV translates the expression as: "...the place where sacrifices are offered and to which burnt offerings are brought."

[e-e] מלכא מרבית - *lit.* house of the king. The explicit financial support of Persia in the Aramaic version of the Cyrus decree is absent from the Hebrew version of the decree. Financial support in Ezra 1:2-4 is solicited from the private sector in contrast, here, to state sponsorship.

[f-f] מרהיכלא דיבירושלם - The return of the sacred vessels carried off by Nebuchanezzar is, here, decreed, unlike in Ez 1:6f where the same is a narrative component and not an explicit stipulation of the decree.

[8-8] בית אלהם - There is an explicit contrast of imagery between the "temple" ransacked by Nebuchadrezzar and the rebuilding of the same building now conceptualised, among others, as the *house of God.*

Comparing the Cyrus decrees: The *common* features between the Ezra 1 and Ezra 6 versions of the Cyrus decree include: date and permission to build. Contrary to Blenkinsopp (1988:124) there is no continuity in terms of permission to return the temple vessels. Ezra 1:2-4 does not decree the return of temple paraphanalia (which does occur, later - *see* Ez 1:6f). However, the return of temple furniture is not formally part of the Cyrus decree. Rather, the descriptive detail of the return of temple furniture forms part of the narrative discourse as opposed to being technically part of the imperial decree.

The *differences* between the two decrees can be tabulated as follows:

Ez 1:2-4 (Hebrew)	**Ez 6:2b-5 (Aramaic)**
Return to the land from Babylon is a major emphasis.	No emphasis *vis-a-vis* the return the land.
The expenses for rebuilding the 'house of God' was collected from the private sector (re: Exodus motif).	Rebuilding the temple - an explicitly state-funded enterprise.
No measurements are provided for the actual building. The major focus is the 'idea' that a house of God was to be built.	The major focus, here, is the physical building itself, i.e., details/measurements of the construction are provided.

There is no scholarly consensus that accounts for the existence of two Cyrus decrees. Some argue that these are two independent documents dealing with the same case (*so* Bickerman 1946:250-253; Myers 1965:5 *contra* Blenkinsopp 1988:125). Others, like Galling (1954) argue that we have here two completely different decrees. One dealing exclusively with the actual return and another dealing exclusively with the rebuilding programme.

Linguistic nuances: There is an interesting and unusual blend of linguistic nuances and imagery that emerges when one compares the two versions. The linguistic paradigm 'house of God' (particular to the Hebrew version) is complemented in Aramaic by the use of the word 'temple'. The 'temple' language is introduced simultaneously with the references to acts of sacrilege performed by Nebuchadrezzar. It seems that the use of 'house of God' as opposed to holy 'temple' is a less painful way of historical recollection. Indeed, the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadrezzar was one of the more devastating events in the Israelite history.

TABLE 2a - *IMPERIAL DECREES*

DECREE OF ARTAXERXES
EZRA 4:17-22

TRANSLATION

(v.17.) The King replied with the following [a]message[a]: To Rehum the commander-in-charge and Shimshai the secretary and the rest of their colleagues who live in Samaria and in the rest of the province Beyond the River, greeting. [b]And now:[b]
(v.18.) The [c]official document[c] that you sent to us has been read clearly before me.
*(v.19.) And so I made a [d]**decree**[d] and someone searched and found that this city has risen against kings from a long time ago, and that rebellion and sedition have been perpetrated in it. (v.20.) Jerusalem has had powerful kings who ruled over the whole province Beyond the River, to whom tribute, tax, and duty were paid. (v.21.) Now, then, issue a decree that these people be made to stop, and that this city not be rebuilt until I give a decree. (v.22.) And, be warned not to be [e]negligent[e] in this matter: why should injury to the king develop.*

(v.23.) Then a copy of the official document of King Artaxerxes was read before Rehum, Shimshai the scribe and their colleagues. They hurried to Jerusalem to all the Jews and stopped them from working using [f]force and military power[f].

SOME TEXTUAL OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS

[a-a] פתגמא - corresponds in meaning to Hebrew דבר (Jerusalmi 1978:8), and can be translated by message, word or matter. (See also Ez 5:7,11; 6:11; cf.Dan 3:16; 4:14).

[b-b] וכעת - a standard introduction to the message after customary salutations (cf. Ez 4:11; 7:12).

[c-c] נשתונא - an official document (*also* v.23), which reflects more the political sense than the rendering of it as a 'letter' (*so* NSRV).

[d-d] טעם - The most commonly used word to describe an imperial decree in E-N.

[e-e] וזהירין הוו שלו - This warning amounts to a royal command/decree and implicitly carries the same weight as טעם. It must be emphasised that the king is not merely reminding his representatives to be attentive to the matter of the rebuilding programme of the Golah, but is in fact issuing a stern warning.

f-f וחיל באדרע [*lit.* with force and military power] - Rehum and his colleagues did not hesitate to carry out the commands of the Persian king. Their enthusiasm is directly proportional to the stern warning *vis-a-vis* the failure to implement the commands of the king. It is interesting that 1 Esdras 2:30 supplements the MT description of Rehum's enthusiasm as that of coming with horses and a mob of troops in battle array and in this way hindered the work of those building the 'house of God which is in Jerusalem'. While the MT does not make explicit the exact method used to force the Jews to stop building, one need only observe the linguisitc nuances in this regard. The text therefore minimises the conflict (probably physical combat) between the Persian government representatives and the Golah-temple-building community. The tone and content of the Nehemiah narrative which describes a similar encounter during the Nehemiah mission is just the opposite. The Nehemiah text unashamedly discusses the arming of the builders so as to prevent the opposition from using force and military power to stop their building programme.

TABLE 2b - *IMPERIAL DECREES*

DECREE OF ARTAXERXES
EZRA 7:12-26

TRANSLATION

(v.11.) This is a copy of the [a]memorandum[a] which King Artaxerxes gave to the priest Ezra, [b]the scribe, scholar of the text of the commandments of YHWH[b] and his statutes for Israel.

(v.12.) Artaxerxes, king of kings, to the priest Ezra, the scholar of the law of the God of heaven: Peace. And now: (v.13.) I decree that any of the people of Israel or their priests or Levites in my kingdom who voluntarily offers to go to Jerusalem may go with you. (v.14.) For you are sent by the king and his [c]seven advisers[c] to investigate concerning Judah and Jerusalem [d]in terms of the law of your God which is in your hand[d] (v.15.) And also to convey the silver and gold that the king and his advisers have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem, (v.16.) with all the silver and the gold that you shall find in the whole province of Babylonia, and with the freewill offerings of the people and the priests, given willingly for the house of their God in Jerusalem. (v.17.) With this money, then, you shall without delay purchase bulls, rams and lambs, and their grain offerings and their drink offerings, and you shall offer them on the altar of the house of your God in Jerusalem. (v.18.) Whatever seems appropriate to you and your colleagues to do with the rest of the silver and gold, you may do, according to the will of your God. (v.19.) The vessels that have been given you for the service of the house of your God, you shall hand them over to the God of Jerusalem. (v.20.) And whatever else is required for the house of your God, which you are responsible for providing, you may provide out of the [e]royal treasury[e]. (v.21.) I, King Artaxerxes, issue a decree to all the treasurers in the province Beyond the River: Whatever the priest Ezra, the scholar of the law of the God of Heaven requires - let the request be met [f]with precision[f], (v.22.) up to one hundred talents of silver, one hundred cors of wheat, one hundred baths of wine, one hundred baths of oil, and unlimited salt. (v.23.) [g]Whatever is decreed by the God of Heaven[g], let it be done with zeal on behalf of the house of the God of Heaven or wrath will come upon the domain of the king. (v.24.) We also notify you that it shall not be lawful to impose tribute, custom or toll on any of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, the temple servants, or other servants of this house of God. (v.25.) And you, Ezra, according to the God-given wisdom which is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges who may judge all the people in the province Beyond the River who know the laws of your God: and you shall teach those who do not know them. (v.26.) All who will not obey [h]the law of your God and the law of the king[h], let judgment be executed [i]with precision[i] on them, whether the death sentence, banishment, confiscation of their property or imprisonment.

SOME TEXTUAL OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS

[a-a] הנשתון - memorandum (cf.Ez 4:7,18,23)

[b-b] הספר ספר דבי מצות־יהוה - In addition to genealogical legitimation, Ezra is also described, in v.6, as a scribe skilled in the law of Moses [בתורת משה] - a clear attempt to link Ezra with the Moses and the Exodus tradition. Yet, v.12, which is technically part of the formal decree of Artaxerxes, only describes Ezra as a scholar skilled in the law of Heaven, and not skilled in the Torah of Moses. While this is a dual reference to the same expertise the explicit reference to Moses (outside the confines of the imperial decree) reflects the bias of the redactor.

[c-c] ושבעת יעטהי - The reference to seven advisers is more likely a redactional inference to the perfection of the advisory counsel of the king than to the literal number of advisory counsellors. The nuance of meaning here is probably to indicate that the perfect judgment of the king and his perfectly constituted board of advisers.

[d-d] בדת אלהך די בידך - This expression is has a dual meaning. The literal meaning is with reference to the Torah which Ezra hand-carried from Babylonia to Jerusalem (cf.Neh 8:1-2; Ez 10:3). Figuratively, this expression is another way of describing Ezra's personal knowledge and wisdom relative to the Torah of Moses (*see* v.25).

vv.15-16: These verses make explicit the two sources of financial support for the rebuilding programme: the royal court (the king and his advisers) and the residents of Babylonia. The contributions from the residents of the province of Babylonia is reminiscent of the Exodus tradition (*see* Ex 11:2). The Aramaic version of the Cyrus decree ascribes financial and material support for the Golah as coming from the royal treasury, while the Hebrew version of the Cyrus decree describes how 'the people' provide the necessary financial and material support.

[e-e] מלכא גנזי מרבית - (cf.Ez 6:4) - The decree of Artaxerxes, here, makes explicit that any **additional** expenses incurred by the Golah will be paid from state funds. Thus, Persia's committment to the rebuilding of the temple is open-ended and not just a *once-off* sponsorship.

[f-f] אספרנא [*lit.* exactly, perfectly] - (cf.Ez 6:12; 7:17,26) .

[g-g] כל־די מרטעם אלה שמיא - The shift of authority-base is not to go unnoticed. In the preceding verses (i.e. vv.21-22) King Artaxerxes decrees that all the treasurers in the province Beyond the River, with perfect precision, [אספרנא] must assist Ezra with whatever he requires. Thus, a radical literary-ideological shift now imposes itself on the text: No longer must the treasurers provide for 'whatever Ezra requests' but, now, also, for 'whatever **God** requests'. The consequences for the failure to meet the requests of God are clearly spelt out in v.26. Clearly, the text assumes Ezra's requests to be synonymous to those of God and is more than just good theology. This is one of the few instances where the spiritual-ideological agenda is most explicit (*see also* Ez 6:14).

[h-h] דתא דיאלהך ודתא די מלכא - The dual source of legal and civil authority is unmistakable, namely *God* and *King*. Ezra is instructed to educate those in Jerusalem-Judah, who are not conversant with the laws of God, so that they may also be held legally accountable in terms of the law (*so* v.25).

The explicit combination of God and King *vis-a-vis* the penal code governing Jerusalem-Judah, while most explicitly, here a part of the imperial decree, is only part of the third person narrative in Ezra 1-6 (*see especially* Ez 6:14). It is in Ezra 6:14 that the narrator creatively combines God and King within the context of imperial decrees. In Ezra 7:26, however, such a combination forms part of the imperial decree itself, reflecting a literary-ideological development in terms of the authority of the imperial

decrees.

[i-i] (*see* [f-f]) - The ironic twists in the narrative revolve around this term. Not only must the requests of God (Ezra!) be met with precision, but in like manner, the punishment for failure to meet these requests will be carried out with corresponding precision.

TABLE 3 - *IMPERIAL DECREES*

DECREE OF DARIUS
EZRA 6:6-12

TRANSLATION

(v.6.) Now, you, Tattenai, governor of the province Beyond the River, Shethar-bozenai, and your colleagues, the [a]leading officials[a] in the province Beyond the River, keep away: (v.7.) Let the work on this ***house of God*** *alone; let the [b]governor of the Jews[b] and the elders of the Jews rebuild this* ***house of God*** *on its site. (v.8.) And also, I make a [c]decree[c] regarding what you shall do for these elders of the Jews for the rebuilding of this* ***house of God****: the cost is to be paid to these people, in full and without delay, from the [d]royal revenue[d], the tribute of the province Beyond the River. (v.9.) Whatever is needed - young bulls, rams or sheep for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, or oil, as the priests in Jerusalem require - let that be given to them day by day without fail, (v.10.) so that they may offer pleasing sacrifices to the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king and his children. (v.11.) Furthermore, I decree that if anyone alters this edict, a beam shall be pulled out of the house of the perpetrator, who then shall be [e]impaled on it.[e] The house shall be made a [f]dunghill[f]. (v.12.) May the God who has established his name there overthrow any king or people that shall put forth a hand to alter this, or to destroy this [g]****house of God****[g] in Jerusalem. I, Darius, make a decree; let it be done with all precision.*

SOME TEXTUAL OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS

[a-a] אפרסכיא [*translated as* leading officials (=Rosenthal 1974:58); inspectors (=Blenkinsopp 1988:125)]. The Persian influence shows itself clearly in the sphere of political and legal phraseology (*for more detailed discussion see* Rosenthal 58).

[b-b] יהודיא פחת [governor/chancellor of the Jews] - In the report submitted by Tattenai to Darius

there is no mention of a governor of the Jews, only elders (שׂבי). The inclusion of such a phrase might again be evidence of later redactional additions (Blenkinsopp 1988:127).

[c-c] טעם - see above comments for Ezra 4:19

[d-d] מנכסי מלכא [*lit.* from the properties of the king] - The state sponsorship of the rebuilding programme, under Darius, is in continuity with the Aramaic Cyrus decree (*see* Ez 6:4). However, here, the specific source of state funding is identified, namely the tribute of the province Beyond the River. In other words, the funding is to come from the local economy administered from Samaria. This could not have been very pleasing to those officials who benefitted from the tributory tax-base of early Second Temple Palestine.

[e-e] זקיף - [crucify/affix/impale] - The precise meaning is unclear. The preferred translation '*impaled on it*' is supported by the Persian practice of impaling, inherited from the Assyrians, and reserved for the most serious crimes, especially sedition and the violation of treaty oaths (Blenkinsopp 1988:128).

[f-f] נולו - *see* 2 Kings 10:27 for a similar punishment for disobedience.

[g-g] בית־אלהא is an expression used rather frequently here. The Cyrus decree (Ez 6:2b-5) uses the expression thrice while the Darius decree, here, uses it four times and probably points to redactional activity (Blenkinsopp 1988:126).

TABLE 4 - *IMPERIAL DECREES*

DECREE OF ARTAXERXES
NEHEMIAH 2:7-9

TRANSLATION
(v.5.) Then I said to the king: [a]If it pleases the king[a], and if your servant has found favour with you, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my ancestors' graves, [b]so that I may rebuild it[b]. ... *(v.7.) Then I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let [c]**letters**[c] be given to me [so that I might give them] to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may grant me passage until I arrive in Judah; (v.8.) and a **letter** to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, directing him to supply me with timber to make beams for the gates of the temple fortress, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy." And the king granted me what I asked. For the good hand of my God was upon me. (v.9.) Then I came to the governors of the province Beyond the River, and gave them the [d]**king's letters**[d]. The king had sent me with an escort of [e]army officers and horsemen[e].*

SOME TEXTUAL OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS

[a-a] טוב אם־על־המלך - (*also* v.7) - Nehemiah takes a safe risk by couching his patriotic feelings within the context of what the king ultimately would consider pleasing and non-threatening to Persian hegemony in Jerusalem-Judah.

[b-b] ואבנהו - Nehemiah's request *vis-a-vis* rebuilding the graves of his ancestors, is couched in personal, and not explicit political terms. He, personally, was going to 'rebuild it'. He, no doubt, has carefully chosen his words, thus avoiding the mention of **Jerusalem**, that seditious and rebellious city (*re:* Ez 4:12).

[c-c] אגרות - This term is used to describe both royal correspondence (v.8,9; 2 Chron 30:1,6), as well as other correspondence (Neh 6:5, 17, 19; Es 9:26, 29).

[d-d] אגרות המלך - The number of letters granted to Nehemiah are not specified. We do know that he made three requests to the king, two of which required the issuing of letters. The first letter requested was a royal document that would provide the necessary security as he journeyed to Jerusalem. These letter(s) was addressed to the governors [פחוו] of the province Beyond the River, and in effect, acted like an official (royal) passport.

The second type of letter is more of a requisition. The letter is directed to Asaph, the custodian of the king's forest, directing (commanding!) him to provide the necessary material support needed by Nehemiah.

[e-e] שרי חיל ופרשים - The provision of an armed escort, together with guides and travel rations was a standard procedure for travel in this period (Blenkinsopp 1988:216). However, the visibility of an armed escort accompanying the Nehemiah caravan is accentuated by the absence of such an escort for the Ezra caravan, which had more to do with Ezra's notions of spirituality than strategic political sense (Ez 8:21-23).

CHAPTER 1

A REVIEW OF EZRA-NEHEMIAH RESEARCH

E-N studies has been dominated, to date, by a debate concerning the text's compositional history. Within the broad parameters of the debate, there has been an intense focus on literary and historical matters. Scholars have demonstrated that the E-N literature is plagued with literary as well as historically-oriented problems (*see* Williamson 1987:48), which have been richly catalogued (*see* e.g. Rowley 1965:135-168; Bright 1972:392-403; Japhet 1994:190-208) and need no discussion here. Mallau (1988), although confining his comments to his analysis of Ezra 4-6, has captured what might well be the general research situation for E-N studies, with the appropriate sub-heading "Many problems and no solutions". One must add the observation that, for almost a century now, E-N studies have suffered from what Kraemer (1993:73) calls a "powerful historicist bent". A case in point is Japhet's recent attempt to unravel the historical and literary problems using a historiographical rationale as the underlying organising principle for E-N (1994:208-216). Thus, while the E-N text reflects both literary and historical problems, scholars have tended to answer these, almost exclusively, from the vantage point of historical analysis.

It is true, however, that some recent E-N research reflects a broader spectrum of interests than that of the past with a variety of approaches to the text, including archaeological analysis (Stern 1982; Hoglund 1992; Carter 1991), literary analysis (Eskenazi 1988), social scientific analysis (Kreissig 1973; Kippenberg 1982; Weinberg 1972, 1973a, 1973b, 1976, 1992; Diakonoff 1969, Kraemer 1993), genre

analysis (Japhet 1991a) and gender analysis (Carroll 1992a; Blenkinsopp 1991a; Camp 1985).

In spite of the broadened spectrum of interests, a noticeable absence in E-N research is in attention to the significant role played by the imperial decrees in both the formation and exegetical analysis of E-N. The imperial decrees of Persia (i.e., the decrees of Cyrus [Ez 1:2-4; 6:3-5], Darius [Ez 6:6-12] and Artaxerxes [Ez 4:17-23; 7:12-26; Neh 2:7-9]) have not been considered important to the discussion of the literary and historical character of the E-N text. Scholars have limited discussion concerning the imperial decrees to the question of their authenticity. The most recent major study of the decrees, undertaken by Hensley (1977), does not move the debate beyond the analytical lines which had already been drawn at the turn of the century, namely a decision for or against the authenticity of the Persian documents in E-N, of which the imperial decrees are a vital component.

Furthermore, as far as can be determined, there has not yet been any attempt to try to combine research interests in the literary and historical problems surrounding the debate concerning the compositional history of E-N with those of research interests concerning the imperial decrees. Scholarship has tended to assume that an analysis of the imperial decrees has no bearing on the literary and historical problems which inform the E-N text. The scholarly oversight is largely due to the limitations of the "historicist bent" which has characterised E-N studies for so long. It is thus important

to demonstrate, by means of the following review of research, the scholarly myopia and the resultant deficiencies of engaging in an investigation into the literary and historical character of E-N without any reference to the imperial decrees.

It seems unlikely that an analysis of the imperial decrees can resolve the difficult literary and historical problems which plague the E-N literature. However, the existence of difficulties need not inhibit exegetical attempts to discover other nuances of meaning within the E-N literature. The argument, here, is that if we focus our analytical skills on the imperial decrees, we may be in a position to comment further on the literary and historical character of the E-N text, in spite of the abundance of literary and historical problems which has brought this line of E-N inquiry to a standstill.

1.1 COMPOSITIONAL HISTORY, LITERARY & HISTORICAL CONCERNS

Scholarly consensus holds that an important characteristic of canonical E-N is that it is the final literary product of a compositional history (Klein 1992:732-734; Williamson 1987:14-36). Another salient feature is that, prior to Josephus, the E-N text had uniquely preserved all of the historical information of the Jews in the century 538-432 B.C.E. The only exceptions are the book of Haggai and the book of Zechariah, which tell us about the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem between 520-515 B.C.E. (Pfeiffer 1962:217; Widengren 1977:489-493). Any study of the E-N material must therefore reflect an appreciation for the interplay between the literary

and the historical characteristics, in order to appreciate the content and character of the literature.

Scholars like Talmon (1962:321-322) and Eskenazi (1988) pay particular attention to the creative literary abilities of a compiler(s) of the E-N literature in terms of his piecing together of disparate bits of tradition, be they oral or written, into a seemingly *coherent* narrative. While both Talmon and Eskenazi focus on the literary nuances, they do so for very different reasons. Talmon, for example, identifies the various redactional seams and repetitions, rearranging the text to provide a reconstruction which is historically and chronologically more accurate than the given text (*so also* Batten 1913). Eskenazi, on the other hand, reads the text in its canonical form, arguing for an overall literary symmetry that does not necessitate rearranging the text as it presently stands in the Masoretic Text.

A debate concerning the compositional history of E-N further complicates any study of E-N. The compositional history of the text is complex and has been the subject of intense scholarly discussion for a long time (*see* e.g. Torrey 1896; Rowley 1965; Kellermann 1968a; Pavlovsky 1957; Emerton 1966; Yamauchi 1980; Japhet 1994). Needless to say, there is no scholarly consensus as to the various stages of compilation of E-N or its literary character.

The lack of consensus does serve to remind one of a fundamental methodological

presupposition, *viz.*, that the criterion by which the biblical compilers selected their data, as well as the intention behind their composition and re-compositions of the text, is not made explicit within the text. The processes and intentions can only be inferred by the exegete, in a way that depends on the exegetical method employed. There are, certainly, a host of exegetical options facing the contemporary exegete, and the conclusions reached invariably relate to the methodological option chosen. It would be fallacious to assume that the conclusions reached with the use of a particular analytical method reflect more truth and accuracy than with the use of another. Each method tries to answer a certain set of questions. A few of the approaches possible include the grammatical-historical, historical-critical, South African discourse analysis, psycho-analytical, literary, and historical-materialist (*see* Nel 1989:64-74).

Most of the analyses and hypotheses *vis-a-vis* the E-N literature, from past to present, have been premised on the historical-critical method, which seeks to establish a historical sequence as normative, disregarding any theological intent which would override the concerns of the modern historian. The approach also assumes that the biblical text can only function as a referent to identifiable historical events (Childs 1979:630, 637).

Brevard Childs is certainly correct when he says that "There are times in which historical and literary questions can be left unresolved without jeopardizing the hearing of the biblical message" (1979: 637), but Childs is too restrictive by insisting

that the canonical form of the text is the *only* interpretive context for exegetical activity (cf.Barton 1984:77-103). While one can understand Childs's quest to restore the biblical text which the historical-critical method has left in fragments, some relevant questions do emerge. For example, Why should the exegete be held captive by the intentions and ideology of the final editor, especially if the final composition is perceived to reflect the interests of the dominant and oppressing classes of the society? Is there not a way in which we can recognise the presence of the redactional layers of the text and its composite form, while treating the text in a wholistic manner? Childs's critique and concern with the fragmentation caused by the employing of minute historical-critical investigation, without reassembling pieces afterwards, must surely be noted. However, it does seem that we must find a way out of the captivity of the final form of the text (cf.Sanders 1984). A failure to do so minimises the powerful role of a literary piece, such as E-N, which is so obviously composite.

1.2 LINGUISTIC AND STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

The foremost analytical tool used to investigate the compositional and historical character of E-N has been linguistic and stylistic analysis. The foremost literary-theological assumption, the scholarly dogma in E-N studies, has been the assumption that the books of Ezra and Nehemiah must be studied in conjunction with the books of Chronicles. Scholars have compared the language and style of Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah and have reached diverging opinions. Scholarly opinion is divided into two

basic positions, each with variations. One view is that E-N is to be considered a ***part of*** the book of Chronicles and must therefore be interpreted through the theological framework of Chronicles (or the Chronicler). An opposing view is that E-N must be seen to be ***distinct from*** the book of Chronicles and must therefore be interpreted independently thereof (cf.Klein 1976:368f; 1992:734-735).

Sara Japhet (1968, 1982, 1983a) outlines well the development of the dominant position, the hypothesis that Chronicles and E-N originally formed one continuous work, written or compiled by one author, namely the "The Chronicler" (cf. Movers 1834; Torrey 1896; Noth 1943:123; Kellermann 1967:32n.4; Clines 1984:9). The main internal arguments sustaining the position are the alleged similarity of vocabulary, syntactic phenomena and stylistic peculiarities, well illustrated by Driver (1894:502-507) and Curtis-Madsen (1910:27-36). Other evidence used to substantiate the hypothesis hangs on an alleged uniformity of theological conceptions, expressed both in the material of the texts and its selection (Driver 1894:484).

There are, of course, variations within the majority opinion. The evident disarray of the E-N material leads scholars like Rudolf (1949) to argue that an "original" order of the Chronicler's work can be recovered (cf.Hölscher 1923). Mowinckel (1964) and Pohlmann (1970) refine Rudolf's claim to ascribe the present literary arrangement to a post-Chronistic redaction. Cross (1975:11f), on the other hand, posits three editions of the Chronicler's work, with the Nehemiah memoirs attached to the Chronicler's work

in its final edition. In contrast, Williamson (1985:xxxiv) argues that the Nehemiah memoirs are, in fact, part of the earliest strata of the E-N literature, and by implication, the Chronistic history.

The work of Polzin (1976), a student of Cross, cannot be overlooked, even though he does not engage directly in the debate concerning common authorship. Polzin's contribution comes in the form of his historical-typological analysis of Late Biblical Hebrew, which does have considerable impact on the debate of common authorship. He analyses the language of the Chronicler in order to delineate the relationship of the respective languages of Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah. Polzin (1976:72) interprets Nehemiah as containing Memoir [N^1] and non-Memoir [N^2] material. His analytical proposal reads:

> First we shall show that the language of Ezra is almost identical to that of Chr from a linguistic point of view. Secondly, we shall establish that the language of N^2 differs significantly from that of N^1. The nature of the difference places N^2 as close linguistically to Chr as Ezr is (Polzin 1976:70 quoted in Throntveit 1982:209).

While Polzin's analysis does us a great service in terms of isolating characteristics of Later Biblical Hebrew, Throntveit's critique of the linguistic-stylistic methodology cannot be ignored. After subjecting Polzin's analysis to the criteria which Williamson (1977) has devised, Throntveit (1982:215) concludes:

> Surely, his [Polzin] statement that we have an "extremely strong case for similarity in authorship of Chr. and Ezr." (p.71) needs to be modified to read, "an extremely strong case for similarity in *language*".

Throntveit's critique needs to be taken a stage further. He certainly has a valid point in

limiting Polzin's conclusions to a similarity in language. What must be added is the observation that a similarity of language does not necessarily imply a unity of purpose or a unity of ideology.

An alternative view to that of the common authorship hypothesis, first proposed by Japhet (1968), is that many linguistic and stylistic differences between Chronicles and E-N can be identified. Consequently, the differences undermine the theory of common authorship. E-N, Japhet argues, must be treated as a composition *separate* from the book of Chronicles, which implies that its literary method, historical understanding, world view and historical reliability should be studied independently of the Chronicler (*see* Japhet 1982/83a). Ideological differences between E-N and Chronicles, while not discussed at any length, are noted as further evidence for separate authorship (*see* Eskenazi 1988:36)

A variation on treating E-N as a separate composition from Chronicles is Kraemer's (1993) suggestion that Ezra and Nehemiah should be treated as independent books. He argues that the ideological differences between the book of Ezra and the book of Nehemiah are too stark to be considered as part of one compilation. Kraemer says:

> I conclude that the relationship of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, is in a general sense, analogous to that of 1 and 2 Maccabees; that is to say, they report on an overlapping but not identical historical period, but from significantly different ideological perspectives (Kraemer 1993:77).

Kraemer's call for a separation of the book of Ezra from the book of Nehemiah must be placed within the context of biblical tradition. Kraemer recognises that there is a

long-standing belief that the book of Ezra and the book of Nehemiah were, as originally conceived, part of one literary work. However, the reasons for assuming such a combination may simply be historical, in the sense that both Ezra and Nehemiah were active in the same historical epoch, if not simultaneously, then certainly within a decade or two of one another.

While Japhet focuses exclusively on the linguistic *dissimilarities* between Chronicles and E-N, Williamson (1977), in contrast to Japhet, examines the *similarities* between Chronicles and E-N. Strangely enough, Williamson shares the same conclusion as Japhet, namely, that Chronicles and E-N do not share common authorship and must therefore be studied independently of each other. While neither Japhet nor Williamson prove their cases conclusively, sufficient doubt is raised concerning the dominance of the common-authorship hypothesis. Williamson himself says, from the point of view of style, "the onus now rests on those who favour unity of authorship to produce more compelling new arguments to support their position" (1977:59).

In sum, both Williamson and Japhet argue against the dominant view as described above, and both focus on linguistic and stylistic elements to sustain their positions. While Japhet bases her conclusions on the linguistic and stylistic *differences* between E-N and Chronicles, Williamson bases his conclusions on the *similarities* between the two works. The shared conclusion is that E-N must be studied separately from Chronicles.

The methodological tension between the dominant and alternative views, *vis-a-vis* stylistic and linguistic studies relative to Chronistic historical studies, reflects something of a methodological impasse. Two scholars in particular, namely Braun (1979) and Throntveit (1982, 1992), highlight the situation, suggesting a *thematic/theological* approach to Chronistic studies, as opposed to linguistic/stylistic approaches. They write:

> With new possibilities now at hand for considering the literary structure of Ezra-Nehemiah, and with literary and linguistic studies at something of a standstill, I propose that we reinvestigate these areas of primary concern in Chronicles and compare results with Ezra-Nehemiah, hoping thereby to gain additional perspectives into the unity and extent of the Chronicler's History (Braun 1979:53).

> Perhaps the safest course would be to take seriously the *a priori* assumption of separate authorship and investigate both works individually from a theological point of view, leaving the question of authorship open until the intent and message of both are better understood (Throntveit 1982:215).

In his analysis, Braun (1979) examines three themes common to Chronicles and the E-N literature and concludes by claiming:

> Chronicles differs from Ezra-Nehemiah in the concept and terms associated with the doctrine of retribution, its attitude toward the surrounding inhabitants of the land, and at a minimum in its greater emphasis upon the Davidic monarchy. Since these concepts are so central to the Chronicler's theology, it would appear reasonable to conclude that the author of Chronicles is not responsible for at least a significant portion of Ezra-Nehemiah" (Braun 1979:63).

Braun further says that, while we may see strands of continuity between the final redactors and their model of Chronicles, i.e., the Chronicler school of thought, we have to admit that they, out of force of circumstance, "consciously or unconsciously, departed significantly from the theology of their model" (Braun 1979:64).

While Braun notes that there are differences between Chronicles and E-N, it seems that his analysis falls victim to viewing the thematic orientation and content through the eyes of the Chronicler. Braun does not interpret E-N independently of Chronicles. The hermeneutical lens for Braun is clearly Chronistic theology. In other words, Braun has allowed the theological agenda of Chronicles to dictate his excavation of the theological agenda and orientation of the E-N material. E-N is, thus, read through the eyes of the concerns of the book of Chronicles. Braun does note significant differences between the overarching Chronistic school of thought and the E-N school of thought. The intriguing question that can now be posed is: Do the differences merely reflect a different emphasis, or are we dealing, here, with a text which is radically different in terms of its ideological terms of reference? Braun has, to some extent, treated the question by creatively leaving open-ended the question of authorship (cf.Throntveit 1982:215).

This study accepts the view that E-N should be separated from Chronicles for the purpose of exploring the structure and themes distinctive to E-N, making it easier to locate the centre of E-N's own ideology and meaning, without depending upon the interpretive constructs of Chronicles (cf.Eskenazi 1988:36).

1.3 FROM HISTORICAL INQUIRY TO SOCIO-POLITICAL CONCERNS

In her survey of E-N studies, Eskenazi (1993:68) points to Ackroyd as the one scholar who has facilitated a shift in the focus of E-N studies. It is Ackroyd, she says, who has

observed that:

> we cannot understand developments in the Jewish community of Judah (hence Ezra-Nehemiah itself) without taking some account of two facts: (1) Jewish life in this period belonged to a wider stage than the limited area of Judah (Ackroyd 1991:87); and (2) the control of political life by the Persian empire 'inevitably means that domestic concerns, however, central to the lives of the majority of the community, are in measure overruled by international power politics' [Ackroyd (1991:88) *quoted in* Eskenazi 1993:68-69].

In spite of the socio-political emphasis argued for by Ackroyd there remain many issues unresolved. Such issues include, for example, the precise nature of the political organisation of Judah during the Persian period, the nature of opposition to the rebuilding efforts of the Jews, the relationship between Samaria and Judah, and the religious levels and differences reflected through the available data (Eskenazi 1993:69). The historicist approach to E-N has been unable to provide a way forward *vis-a-vis* the above mentioned unresolved issues. Thus, other approaches, which include archaeological, literary, social scientific, genre and gender analysis have been applied to the text as a way of trying better to understand it.

1.4 A BRIEF SUMMARY

The above synopsis of research can be summarised as the attempt to account for the composite character of E-N. The fundamental question guiding such research revolves around whether or not E-N is to be viewed as part of or distinct from the Chronicles. In trying to answer the question, scholars have concentrated their research efforts in a comparative analysis of the linguistic and stylistic features of E-N and Chronicles. Even though Ackroyd suggests that the analytical framework be extended to include

socio-political factors, the primary issue has been that of authorship.

The various attempts to account for the composite character of E-N within the context of its glaring literary and historical problems have not produced any conclusive consensus. In fact, it might be accurate to describe this area of research as being at an impasse. In trying to answer the same question (*viz.*, authorship), using the same method (linguistic and stylistic analysis), scholars have reached opposing viewpoints. The compositional history of E-N therefore remains a contested issue, although the work of Japhet and Williamson dents the dogma of Chronicler authorship.

It, however, remains important to try to understand the composite character of the E-N text, because the text is clearly arranged and compiled to communicate a certain message. The crucial question is still: Why is the material arranged in this manner and not another? What could possibly have motivated the compilers to choose this set of data and to exclude others? However, a quest to understand the composite character of E-N should not be motivated by an attempt to prove the *authenticity* or *falsification* of the data used in the compilation. Rather the *function* of the data within the literary and ideological framework of the text itself should become the focus of analysis. In other words, a literary analysis of the text should not be motivated by a desire to rearrange the text to read in accurate chronological-historical sequence. Conversely, historical analysis should not necessarily depend upon the verifiability of the content of the books.

One possible way out of the research stalemate on the level of the compositional history of the text, is to pose questions which help the exegete to understand the *ideological function* of the literature. It is important to try to determine whose interests would best be served by the present arrangement of the text, helping to account for the dominance of particular themes and interests signified by the text. Also, it is important to try to discover *why* the material is arranged in the way that it is. It seems obvious that, among other motives, the compilers of E-N attempt to present a coherent, logical and accurate historical narrative of the life of the Jews in Judah during the Persian period. However, historically-oriented analysis premised on twentieth-century historiographical assumptions has demonstrated how incoherent and inaccurate E-N is. The issue is then raised as to whose story E-N might be telling.

It is suggested, here, that by asking questions which are relative to political power and ideology, the exegete might not only be able to surpass the methodological stalemate, but also to uncover new levels of meaning within the E-N text itself. It is therefore not unexpected that this study finds an interest in both the implicit and explicit power assumptions within the text itself. The kind of methodological orientation proposed here is keenly interested in matters related to the ideology which undergirds the literary formation and structure of the text itself. Also, questions about who it is that has the power to determine the nature of reality and about the underlying presuppositions of discursive practices in E-N now become of primary concern to the exegete. The exegetical challenge then is to try to make explicit the way in which, if at

all, the discursive practices and ideology of the compilers of this text imprinted themselves on the pages of Ezra-Nehemiah. Questions relative to power and ideology can only be answered adequately by creatively combining literary and historical concerns with a focus on the decrees, as opposed to separating the two areas of scholarly focus. An exegetical method is therefore needed that can adequately hold the dual focus (literary and historical) in tension, particularly since E-N scholars tend to keep the two areas of study separate from each other, and, most certainly, separate from an analysis of the imperial decrees. An example is the recent work of Eskenazi (1988). Her literary analysis of E-N explicitly brackets the historical questions in order to examine E-N as a literary artifact in which diverse sources combine meaningfully to express particular ideologies (Eskenazi 1993:82). By bracketing the historical concerns, Eskenazi seems also to overlook issues of *power* and *ideology* within the text. For example, she argues that E-N shuns the heroic model of history, preferring a more prosaic view, subsuming, therefore, even its most outstanding individual, Ezra, within the community (Eskenazi 1993:82). The shift of focus toward literary concerns, as advocated by Eskenazi, seems to have exactly the opposite effect of that for which she hopes.

A hermeneutic which is sensitive to issues of power poses some penetrating questions to the kind of analysis espoused by scholars such as Eskenazi. One such question, for example, concerns the justifiability of deemphasizing the *heroic* role of the Ezra figure when, in fact, according to the literary structure of the text, Ezra occupies such

a central and powerful role. The story of the rebuilding and reconstruction of Jewish life and identity during the Persian period seems to have been possible only because of a hero-like figure such as Ezra. It seems almost impossible to appreciate the contribution of personalities such as Ezra and Nehemiah to the emerging Jewish community during the Second Temple period, without a fundamental appreciation for the political power and Persian ideological legitimation undergirding their missions. Eskenazi's focus on the *community*, as opposed to *heroic* individuals, does seem to obscure the political reality of political alliances during the Second Temple period. The E-N text itself, it seems, begs to be read in terms of the heroic model. Such issues are left untreated by Eskenazi's otherwise insightful analysis of the literary character of E-N.

This study argues that the exegete is able to identify power politics within the literary character and formation of the E-N text itself. Eskenazi's analysis prefers not to develop in this direction, and, yet, it seems rather naïve to engage in an analysis of the literary character of the text, discussing its ideology, while ignoring the political, economic and military forces which are fundamental features of the process - features being signified by the text itself. In sum, one cannot appreciate the E-N literature solely in terms of its literary patterns and emphases. The exegete needs to consider the broader socio-historical and socio-economic contexts impacting the experiences of the people described in the text. Therefore, an analysis of the literary and compositional character of E-N must seek to address questions of power and ideology. It seems

crucial to try to identify *who* in the text has *what* power and *how* that power is used or abused. Addressing such questions places the exegete on firm ground when having to make judgements *vis-a-vis* the quality, character and meaning of the E-N literature.

1.5 IMPERIAL DECREES: A NEW HERMENEUTICAL GRID

The above synopsis of E-N research is, admittedly, selective and limited. However, sufficient ground is covered to demonstrate the silence of scholarly studies as far as the exegetical meaning of the decrees is concerned. Furthermore, until the present study, the imperial decrees in the E-N text have not been considered to have any impact on the debate *vis-a-vis* the literary character and composition of the E-N text. Scholarly discussion relative to imperial decrees has taken place, so far, within the context of a decision for or against their authenticity. The imperial decrees have been dealt with almost exclusively in terms of their literary form and character and not in terms of their function. In effect, study of the imperial decrees has been limited to form-critical and source-critical analytical frameworks.

As far as can be ascertained, no attempt has yet been made to interpret the imperial decrees outside of, or indeed beyond, traditional historical-critical categories and concerns such as source and form analysis. Furthermore, no attempt has yet been made to interpret the literary and historical character of E-N with reference to the imperial decrees of Persia during the period. In other words, previous literary and historical analysis of E-N has reflected a radical disconnectedness from any reference

to the imperial decrees.

Scholarly myopia in E-N studies, generally, results in an overlooking of the role of political power, politics, and ideology in the formation of the biblical text. An earlier alternative to an exclusively literary approach (cf.Eskenazi 1988) can be detected in the *theological-thematic* approaches of scholars such as Braun and Throntveit. However, as we point out, above, the danger of a theological approach is that of limiting and confining E-N to preconceived thematic categories. Such an approach certainly does not consider the imperial decrees to play any significant role in the development of the *theology* of the E-N text.

Imperial decrees in E-N form part of a larger body of Persian documents which make up at least one-third of the book of Ezra. Hensley (1977:29f) identifies the Persian documents:

Ez 1:2-4 [Hebrew]	Decree of Cyrus II
Ez 6:2b-5 [Aramaic]	Decrees of Cyrus II
Ez 5:7-17 [Aramaic]	Report from Tattenai to King Darius
Ez 6:2b-12 [Aramaic]	Decree of King Darius (reply to Tattenai)
Ez 4:11-16 [Aramaic]	A letter of accusation against the Jews from Rehum and Company to King Artaxerxes
Ez 4:17-22 [Aramaic]	Decree of Artaxerxes I (reply to Rehum and Company)
Ez 7:12-26 [Aramaic]	Decree of Artaxerxes (Permission for Ezra to return

[For reasons outlined in more detail below (see Chapter 4), this study is confined primarily to an analysis of the decrees of Cyrus (Ez 1:2-4; 6:3-5), Artaxerxes (Ez 4:17-23; 7:12-26) and Darius (Ez 6:6-12). In addition to the formal-explicit decrees, must be added the formal-implicit decree of Artaxerxes (Neh 2:7-9) which mandates the repatriation of Nehemiah to Jerusalem-Judah.]

After providing brief summaries and abstracts of various studies directly dealing with

the Persian Documents in E-N, Hensley (1977:19f) succinctly summarises the state of research. He notes that scholarly opinion concerning the Persian documents in the E-N literature can be divided into essentially two camps. One scholarly orientation holds that the official documents are forgeries and therefore of no use in terms of historical analysis. Another group of scholars holds the alternative view, namely that the documents are indeed authentic and therefore valuable for historical research. While the two views are the major positions, it must be noted that there are nuances that need to be mentioned within each viewpoint.

Wellhausen (1895), Torrey (1910) as well as Kaiser (1975) represent the group of scholars which holds the view that all the Ezra Documents are forgeries and therefore worthless. The consensus opinion here is best captured by Torrey:

> Here are documents which from their wording cannot possibly be regarded as true copies of genuine originals; written in a dialect which belongs to a time much later than the one which they profess to represent; containing no fact or materials not obtainable in the Greek period, and unsupported by any tradition from the Persian period; found in the most untrustworthy of all Hebrew histories; themselves written with a manifest tendency; and finding their only close parallels in numerous writings of about the same time which are acknowledged to be inventions...The theory of their authenticity, in any case whatever, has evidently not a leg to stand on (Torrey 1910:156-157).

Over a period of time, the debate concerning the literary quality and character of the Persian documents, in general, has developed into a debate concerning the authenticity of the decree of Cyrus in Ezra 1:2-4 in particular (*see* Grosheide 1954). The decree of Cyrus has become the most contested, if not rejected, document. Bickerman best exemplifies scholarly opinion which restricts itself to analytical decisions concerning

the quality and character of the Cyrus decree in Ezra 1:2-4. In the following quotation Bickerman not only summarises the state of research relative to the decree of Cyrus, but also injects a new nuance into the debate:

> There are in Ezra two ordinances of Cyrus concerning the Return from the Captivity; one in Hebrew (Ezra 1:2-4), the other in Aramaic (Ezra 6:3-5). Some scholars regard both instruments as two versions of the same royal edict; but, since a comparison of the two texts discloses very great differences, they conclude that one at least of the two ordinances cannot be authentic. Critics who accept as genuine the Aramaic transcripts of the Persian records in Ezra, accept the Hebrew Edict of Cyrus which has few defenders; and, following Torrey, some regard the Aramaic instrument as unreliable. As a matter of fact, this deductive reasoning is deceiving because it is based on a fallacy of presumption. An examination of the formulae of both documents show that they are not variants of the same record but two independent records concerning the same case (Bickerman 1946:249-250).

Scholars such as Meyer (1986) and de Vaux (1971) are representative of those who doubt the authenticity of Ez 1:2-4, in particular, but consider the Aramaic collections to be authentic. Baumgartner (1927) and Rowley (1929) on the other hand view the Aramaic versions of the decree of Cyrus as falsifications. Batten (1913:60-61) holds the view that the Hebrew version of the Cyrus decree (Ez 1:2-4) is authentic and the Aramaic version (Ez 6:3-5) is the forgery. Boyd (1900a, 1900b, 1900c), to the contrary, argues that the Aramaic documents are genuine and that Ezra 1:24 is itself a translation from Aramaic. Scholars such as Schaeder (1930) limit their analysis to the Aramaic sections of Ezra, namely chapters 4-6 (*see also* Mallau 1988), arguing that Tabeel, mentioned in Ez 4:7, is the author of the entire document (i.e.Ez 4-6) to Artaxerxes.

In trying to provide a consensus view concerning research into the Persian documents

in Ezra, Hensley (1977:23) notes that scholars tend to argue for a compromise position, viewing the documents as "substantially authentic documents", which means that scholars now regard the Persian Documents in Ezra to be valuable historical sources (Hensley 1977:22).

The state of research into the Persian documents in general and the imperial decrees in particular reflects a state of impasse. As in the debate *vis-a-vis* the compositional history, with its attendant literary and historical concerns, we have, here, conflicting conclusions developed from the same methodological premise. In his methodological critique of studies about the Persian documents in Ezra, Hensley notes that, for the most part, scholars have tended to rely on secondary as opposed to primary sources and notes that very little attention has been paid to matters of style.

> In spite of the increasing amount of contemporary documents that have become available since 1906, there has yet to appear, to the writer's knowledge, a study of the form or style, of official Achaemenid correspondence (Hensley 1977:23).

He adds that too much emphasis has been placed on whether or not the documents are "historically credible" (Hensley 1977:26). However, Hensley's primary concern is still to answer the question: "Can the Ezra Documents be considered to be authentic official Persian documents?" (1977:ii). Like scholars before him, Hensley's primary focus of analysis is dictated by a concern for the authenticity of the Persian documents. However, Hensley's unique contribution to the discussion is his comparative perspective. His use of extra-Biblical evidence is refreshing, though limited. He rightly describes previous studies as being deficient in this regard.

> What is needed for an authentic study of the ED [Ezra Documents] were authentic contemporary Aramaic documents with which to make comparisons. These were provided by the documents discovered at Elephantine in Egypt, which began to be published in quantity in 1906 (Hensley 1977:1-2) [Brackets mine].

After extensive comparative research into the literary quality and character of the Persian documents in Ezra, with an emphasis on linguistic and stylistic analysis, Hensley's answer to the question of the authenticity is in the affirmative.

> The final conclusion drawn by the writer is that linguistically, stylistically, and historically the ED [=Ezra Documents] correspond perfectly to the non-Biblical documents of the Achaemenid period (Hensley 1977:233).

As in the case of the debate *vis-a-vis* the compositional history of the E-N text, linguistic and stylistic analysis is, once again, the primary analytical method, used both to support the view that the Ezra Documents are authentic, as well as the view that they are forgeries. It seems that, as in the case of a discussion of the compositional history of E-N, there is, here, a methodological impasse. Scholars have not yet developed an analytical method which would locate the imperial decrees of E-N within the broader literary and ideological context of the E-N literature itself. The preoccupation with the form and structure of the imperial decrees results, at best, in a neglect for an analysis of their function within the literature.

This study proposes to move beyond the limitations of a linguistic and stylistic analysis of the imperial decrees. The motivating analytical question that arises as a result of the methodological impasse concerns the ***function*** of the imperial decrees. It is more useful at this stage of the study to accept *a priori* the authenticity of the

decrees. The E-N text itself does not doubt the authenticity of the decrees. In fact, the authentication or falsification of the decrees, on a strictly literary level, are inconsequential to the ideological warfare described in E-N. Insofar as the text reflects an actual history, the legitimacy and viability of the restoration project depended on the authenticity of the decrees in substance, if not in all details. Of course, the compilers of E-N don't argue for the authenticity of the decrees, probably because they presuppose them as authentic. Rather than arguing for or against their authenticity, the thrust of the debate reported by the compilers of E-N revolves around the (ideological) *function* of the decrees. Both the *Golah* and the *people of the land* use the decrees, equally, as a tool to discredit the power and influence of the other. It, therefore, seems reasonable to approach the imperial decrees in E-N from the point of view of their political and ideological function in the text, as opposed to their linguistic and stylistic character. The imperial decrees of Persia, therefore, are the fundamental hermeneutical key to understanding both the literary structure and ideology of the E-N literature.

Thus, in terms of a way out of the E-N methodological stalemate, as well as a means of excavating new nuances of meaning in E-N, a literary-ideological mode of reading the text is proposed here. Such a reading strategy makes explicit the function of the imperial decrees as the structuring poles of literary coherence and meaning of what might, otherwise, seem to be a problematic text both as history and literature.

1.6 CONCLUSION

The above review of E-N scholarship relative to the debates concerning both the compositional history as well as the character of the imperial decrees reflects a preoccupation with linguistic and stylistic modes of analysis. Also, scholars have not yet grown weary of demonstrating the literary inconsistencies and historical incongruencies which characterise the E-N text. The net result of a methodological focus on linguistic and stylistic features of E-N is the total ignoring of the role of ideology in the formation of the E-N text. Specifically, scholars have not considered an analysis of the literary and historical character of the E-N literature with reference to the ideological function of the imperial decrees. This study hopes to correct such scholarly myopia.

The implication of the above review of research in E-N studies is the need for an analysis of E-N which takes cognisance of the ideological function of the imperial decrees in the formation of the E-N literature. Put differently, the ideological function of the imperial decrees must now become the hermeneutical lens through which to view the literary and historical character of the E-N text. To this end, a literary-ideological reading strategy is best suited as a hermeneutical method. The following two chapters are aimed specifically at outlining the chosen method of reading the E-N text.

CHAPTER 2

LITERARY-IDEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS IN SOUTH AFRICA

2.1 ELEMENTS OF A LITERARY-IDEOLOGICAL PARADIGM

A literary-ideological paradigm can be defined as an exegetical approach which attempts to make explicit the *ideological* underpinnings of a biblical text. The ideological content of a text is developed from an analysis of the dialectical relationship between the literary structure of the text and the material conditions, the political and economic factors, impacting the text.

A literary-ideological paradigm presupposes that the exegete can identify and deduce the ideology of a text through an examination of the form and structure of the text itself. Put differently, the literary form and structure of a text signify the ideological commitments of the text.

The above definition of a literary-ideological reading method must not be misunderstood as an exclusively *literary* analytical method. A further presupposition in the literary-ideological method of reading a biblical text is the dialectical relationship between the ideology of a text, as signified by the literary structure, and the material base which contributes to the production of meaning.

A methodological difficulty, if not inconsistency, becomes immediately apparent. The

logic of a literary-ideological approach to E-N, according to the argument above, means that the exegete must first try to identify the formal *style* and *presentation* of the E-N literature. Such identification, it is thought, provides the hermeneutical clues to the ideological orientation and content of the text, which in turn, provide a basis on which to develop the material conditions of the text. The incongruity that emerges has to do with the presupposition that ideology in the text is either dependant upon or influenced by the material conditions of the text. Is it possible for the exegete to adequately articulate the ideology of the text without a knowledge of the material conditions of the text? Can this be articulated by relying solely on the literary form and structure of the text itself? The short answer is, no. Ideology, it is assumed here, "aims to disclose something of the relations between an utterance and its material conditions of possibility, when those conditions of possibility are viewed in the light of certain power-struggles central to the reproduction ... of a whole form of social life" (Eagleton 1991:223; cf.Eagleton 1976). Ideology is thus the product of the dialectical relationship between literary form and structure on the one hand, and the material conditions on the other.

In the case of E-N a methodological dilemma emerges. One cannot articulate the material conditions of the text adequately without recognising that the only *biblical* socio-historical and socio-political information at our disposal is refracted through the hermeneutical prisms of the E-N text itself. The dilemma is here resolved by taking the theoretical position that there is a dialectical relationship between the ideology of a

text and its material base, a kind of constant two-way mirror reflection. The concept of a dialectical relationship balances the notion that ideology in a text is strictly produced by the material realities of the text (i.e., political and economic factors). This study does not hold the view of a strict deterministic relationship between material base and the ideological superstructure.

In sum, a literary-ideological paradigm thus has two essential elements which need to be held in tension. On the one hand, the exegete needs to develop a literary theory which does justice to the nature of the E-N text. On the other hand, the exegete must make explicit and clarify a working definition of ideology.

One of the claims of this study is that one cannot appreciate the literary and historical character of the E-N narrative without assuming the centrality of the imperial decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes. In other words, this study holds the view that the imperial decrees form the literary-ideological nerve centre of the E-N literature. All issues and disputes among persons and groups, as well as all issues and disputes concerning the literary and historical character of E-N, find their resolution in the imperial decrees of Persia, around which the narrative is structured.

There is, as mentioned earlier, a long-standing scholarly debate as to the authenticity of the imperial decrees. The question of authenticity needs to remain open-ended if one wishes to move beyond the debate. It is also necessary to investigate the role the

decrees play, both in the formation of the E-N literature, as well as in the process of the national reconstruction of post-Babylonian Judah. The provisions of the decree of Cyrus facilitated the initial return of expatriate Jews from all over the kingdom to the land of Israel. As a consequence the opportunity for the rebirth of a suppressed and perhaps almost forgotten Jewish-national identity emerged. The E-N text, itself, places significant emphasis on the Cyrus decree. In that the E-N narrative is introduced by quoting the decree, the compilers underlined the fact that it was primarily an imperial decree, the decree of Cyrus, which initially facilitated the return of former exiles to their homeland. In other words, the fact that a decree was issued, seems to have been more important than the need to establish its authenticity. As has already been mentioned, the authenticity of the decree is assumed by the text. Even if this is not the case, it is still legitimate to interpret the role of the decree in terms of its ideological function as opposed to its literary quality. While the two approaches, namely literary quality and ideological function of the imperial decrees, in E-N seem to be juxtaposed, there is no reason why the differing emphases cannot be used in a complementary fashion.

One way in which the exegete may suspend the *authenticity* of the decree debate is to recognise that the E-N text makes explicit the difficulties in the transition from exilic captivity to apparent freedom under Persian colonial domination. The E-N text describes the transition by making explicit the bitter factional politics and ideological warfare of the time. The text points to struggles between factions as they compete for

control over the legitimate right to define Jewish identity in a post-Babylonian Judah. The imperial decrees feature prominently as opposed groups, at various times, use the strategy of appealing to Persia to issue decrees in its own favour. The decrees, then, were used as the criteria wherewith to determine the legitimacy of the dominance of one group over against another. In addition, previous imperial decrees are re-interpreted so as to legitimise the dominance of one particular group.

The imperial decrees should be seen as the founding documents of the *new* Israel , and indeed, the post-exilic E-N community. The literary-ideological implication of such a reading of the E-N text is that the Mosaic law, the tradition of the prophets, and the history preserved by the oral tradition are militantly subjected to a secondary place of importance. The determinant of Jewish identity in a post-Babylonian era was largely established by the extent to which a factional group was able to manipulate the interpretation of the imperial decrees of Persia. The imperial decrees therefore play a fundamental role in determining and dictating the character and content of the dominant ideological consciousness of the E-N text. The consciousness referred to here is the radical policy of Jewish ethnic exclusivism as propagated by Ezra and to a lesser extent Nehemiah. A literary-ideological analysis of E-N using the imperial decrees within a hermeneutical and interpretive grid will show the creative nexus between Persian politics and Judean *theological* controversy.

In sum, the literary-ideological paradigm proposed here wishes to hold in tension both

the literary and historical concerns which E-N scholarship has demonstrated to be problematic. Such a paradigm certainly has not been developed in a methodological vacuum. The immediate hermeneutical context of this study is South African biblical scholarship. An attempt to locate the proposed analytical alternative, i.e. a literary-ideological reading strategy within the broader context of biblical hermeneutics in South Africa, seems more than appropriate.

2.2 BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS IN SOUTH AFRICA

For over a century, the historical critical method of biblical analysis has been the dominant hermeneutical paradigm used by scholars, especially in Europe and North America. Its methodology is well known and has been vigorously explained (e.g. Krentz 1975, van Dyk 1991). Soulon succinctly describes the method:

> Strictly speaking, the historical critical method refers to that underlying principle of historical reasoning which came to full flower in the 19th cent., viz., that reality is uniform and universal, that it is accessible to human reason and investigation, that all events historical and natural occurring within it are in principle comparable by analogy, and that man's [sic] contemporary experience of reality can provide the objective criteria by which what would or could not have happened in the past is to be determined (Soulon 1981:87-89).

The strengths and weaknesses of the historical critical method have been and continue to be a matter of scholarly debate (*see* e.g. Maier 1977; Edwards 1977; Keck 1980; Stoch 1983; Herzog 1983; Swartely 1984; Fryer 1987).

Gerald West (1991:10-17), a South African biblical scholar, forcefully reminds us that the historical critical method is essentially a hermeneutical product of the

Enlightenment. Thus a critique of Enlightenment philosophy must of necessity extend to the historical critical method. It has been argued that the most problematic aspect of the historical critical method has been precisely its Enlightenment-based assumption that texts are stable and objective realities and "if examined with appropriate methods, would reveal their meaning to the unbiased observer" (Herzog 1983:106). Questioning of this Enlightenment-based assumption seems to imply that all texts are to be understood as being unstable and subjective. Are we, by way of a critique of the historical critical method, in fact, claiming that an objective analysis of a text is not possible? Where then is the locus of meaning of a text if not in its objective character?

By way of answering these questions just raised, we repeat the response from liberation theologians generally, who argue that biblical exegesis should not and cannot be done from a position of studied neutrality and Olympian detachment (Rowland & Corner 1989:3) and that texts themselves are not neutral. In other words, one could say that there is a double-subjectivity at work in the analysis of a text; that of the text itself and that of the exegete.

The methodological assumptions that guide biblical exegesis are nowhere more radically contrasted than in the debate between black South African liberation theologians and white Apartheid theologians. In South Africa, biblical hermeneutical discussions are rather actively pursued (e.g. Mouton, van Aarde & Vorster (ed) 1988; Gräbe 1987:1-8; van Huyssteen 1987:9-23; Loader 1987:24-31; van Dyk 1987:32-42;

Scriptura vol.9 (1991)). However, much of the hermeneutical and methodological discussion has been and continues to be dominated by white and, particularly, Afrikaner Reformed biblical scholars (West 1991:32; Deist 1992:311). Mazamisa (1993:67), has, recently, cogently accounted for this scholarly imbalance.

> Intellectual life in South Africa has been shaped by being white-in-the-world, and specifically, by white males. They have participated in and shaped the academic process. This fact has been one of the objective mechanisms which have sustained racial domination. Moreover, white monopoly over research skills and research funding and black exclusion from shaping the academy in this country in a meaningful way, have resulted, for example, in the scarcity of black biblical scholars. Biblical scholarship and the Bible remain firmly in white male hands, for they have access to traditional biblical languages and research funding. The equation of being-white-in-the-world is the control of the production and dissemination of ideas (Mazamisa 1993:67).

In addition to being white-dominated, the biblical interpretive paradigm used is also vigorously Western (i.e., Western European and North American). Western literary and intellectual skills are presupposed *vis-a-vis* the various aspects of the historical critical method (e.g. Deist & Burden (eds.) 1981; van Dyk 1991:77-78).

In the past decade, Afrikaner biblical scholarship has made a tremendous shift from a stance that sought to legitimise Apartheid ideology (cf.Vorster 1983; Bax 1983; Loubser 1987) to a more socio-politically diffuse reading of the scriptures (e.g. Deist 1983; de Villiers [ed.] 1987). Writing from a liberation perspective, West (1991:33) reminds us that English-speaking South African biblical scholars, to a lesser extent than Afrikaner theologians, also have sought to provide biblical justification for Apartheid. Much like their Afrikaner counterparts, English-speaking theologians having been "...trained in the historical critical approaches, they too have failed to

complete the hermeneutic circle and address the question of what the text means for South Africa today" (West 1991:33).

West's critique of the dominant mode of white biblical scholarship, on one level, is correct. White exegetes of Apartheid have not asked what the text means for today and have not completed the hermeneutical circle. West's underlying assumption is that if they had asked about the contemporary significance and meaning of the text they would have discovered that Apartheid could not be legitimised from the Bible. And yet, one has to say that the white Apartheid theologians have, in their own way, completed the circle, answering the question, "what does the text mean for South Africa today" [i.e., a South Africa in which Apartheid was the dominant ideology], in a way thoroughly consistent with their methodology. In fact, they have been bound by the conclusions of their exegetical research, which theologically justifies Apartheid.

The issue at stake, it seems, is not West's critique, namely the failure of biblical scholars to complete the hermeneutical circle. Rather, it is a question of the socio-cultural and socio-economic location of the exegete. An insight from the sociology of knowledge school, that all theology is being shaped by socially-determined values, helps us to understand the reason that a black Dutch Reformed theologian like Allan Boesak (1977; 1984), who emerges from the same theological tradition as the Afrikaner Apartheid theologians, is able to reach very different conclusions when he completes the hermeneutical circle.

While much of white Apartheid biblical scholarship is guided by the historical critical pursuit of *neutral* and *scientific* readings, the dominant black experience of the Bible is that of its having been used as a tool to violently subjugate and negate black life. Takatso Mofokeng (1988:34-42), a black South African theologian, poignantly focuses the black dilemma when he describes it as the incomprehensible paradox of being colonized by a Christian people, while being converted to their religion and accepting the Bible, their very ideological instrument of colonization, oppression and exploitation.

Mofokeng's observation helps us to raise some serious hermeneutical questions: How can the Bible be both a tool of oppression and an instrument of liberation at the same time? Is there any place for the Bible in the black community after the dehumanising experience of Apartheid exegesis? There is no doubt that the Bible is still an integral part of black religious experience in South Africa; what do we, as black readers, do with the Bible? Can we interpret it so as to avoid the pitfalls of Apartheid exegesis? What are the hermeneutical controls for such an interpretive exercise? In fact, on a fundamental level, we might ask ourselves if we need the Bible at all, or if the Bible retains authority after Apartheid. Such questions serve to intensify the existing *interpretive crisis* of biblical scholarship in South Africa today (West 1991:31-41).

There have, of course, been attempts by black South African theologians to *re-read* the Bible for its liberative content (e.g. Moore (ed.) 1973; Maimela 1988; Buthelezi

1977, Boesak 1977; Tutu 1983; cf.Kretzschmar 1986; Mazamisa 1987). However, Itumeleng Mosala (1989) presents the first sustained and radical biblical-hermeneutical challenge relative to South African biblical studies. His unique contribution in this regard is his construction and formulation of an exegetical-hermeneutical paradigm relative to the social, political and cultural struggles of the black working class in South Africa, and the rest of the world. There are three quotations which adequately summarise Mosala's approach.

> ... the bible is the product, the record, the site, and the weapon of class, cultural, gender and racial struggles. And a biblical hermeneutics of liberation that does not take this fact seriously can only falter in its project to emancipate the poor and the exploited of the world (Mosala 1989:193).

> I argue that the category of struggle provides the lens for reading the text in a liberating fashion as well as the codes for unlocking the possibilities and limitation of the biblical texts (Mosala 1989:32).

> The struggle is, depending on the class forces involved, either to harmonise the contradictions inherent in the works and events or to highlight them with a view toward allowing social class choices in their appropriation (Mosala 1989:32).

One, of course, cannot formulate a critique of Mosala by lifting three quotations from his work. However, the three quotations, at the very least, highlight the fact that Mosala's hermeneutical method is global in scope. While such a vision may be programmatic, it is in one sense rather idealistic, if not utopian. More important, however, is Mosala's insistence on *struggle* as a key category in his hermeneutical paradigm. In terms of the exegetical task Mosala has helped us to see, again, that the biblical text is not a neutral object and that those who approach the text do not do so without an ideological agenda (Mosala 1989:65, cf.Penchansky 1992:40).

Mosala's challenge can thus be seen not only as undermining the historical critical paradigm, which consciously and unconsciously continues to inform biblical scholarship in South Africa, but also as redressing the skewed legacy of Old Testament studies in South Africa, a legacy which Deist (1992:315) describes as "the crippling effects of the naïve realist epistemological assumptions inherent in South African *fundamentalism*".

In spite of his radical critique of the historical critical method, Mosala does not reject its value. He does argue, though, that the historical critical method is inadequate as a hermeneutical basis for black liberation from white domination. His specific hermeneutical proposal, which we will discuss more fully below, has understandably generated discussion in South Africa (*see* e.g. West 1991; Domeris 1991a; 1991b). Mosala's work, of course, cannot be seen in isolation from the broader discussion generated by liberation-Marxist-oriented hermeneutics in South Africa (e.g. Mosala 1988; Deist 1983, 1987; De Villiers 1987; Domeris 1988).

One of Mosala's foundational arguments is that if the Bible is ever going to be a tool of black liberation from white oppression it has to be freed from its Western epistemological moorings. Mosala argues persuasively for a historical-materialist approach, which itself is also firmly rooted in the European matrix of Marxist sociology and "qualified" Western epistemology. Mosala seems unaware of his borrowing from Western epistemology (unless it is politically incorrect and

methodologically uncomfortable to admit such borrowing). At best we have here a case of methodological myopia.

Another distinctive feature of Mosala's hermeneutical method is his insistence that the black working class is the only viable hermeneutical grid for biblical exegesis in Apartheid South Africa. In other words, it is through black working class lenses that the Bible is to be read if the Bible is to function as a liberative document. What exactly does he mean by this? He seems to imply that if one is not a member of the black working class one cannot engage in a liberative reading of the Bible. On the other hand, Mosala might well mean that one does not necessarily need to be black and working class, but could, in fact, organically, try to view reality through the eyes of a black working class person. There is no doubt that Mosala's hermeneutical method is a politically-engaging reading, even though it is unclear to what extent his hermeneutical option excludes anyone not qualifying as the composite person, namely a racially/ideologically black and economically working class person. There is no doubt that Mosala wants to look very critically at the economic and political processes behind the text from the vantage point of those who suffer most in Apartheid South Africa, namely, the members of the black working class.

It is almost certain that Mosala would be the first to caution hermeneuticians that his materialist method emerged from within the context of repressive Apartheid hegemonic control. The pressing question in a post-Apartheid milieu is whether such

a hermeneutic is still relevant. It remains a debate as to whether South Africa'a first all-inclusive democratic national elections of 1994 represents a real move toward a political dispensation that will benefit the vast majority of South African citizens, not least, the black working class. While the hegemonic tentacles of Apartheid will be evident for a long time still, there is no doubt that the South African context has and continues to undergo significant structural changes. Of course, the impact of the changes must still filter down to the grassroots people, i.e. the black working class. In the interim the question remains: Is the black working class any better off today than they were during the Apartheid era? While it may be too early to answer such a question adequately, we can at least say that the possibility exists that the black working class is poised to benefit from a black majority democratic government in South Africa.

What is the relevance of all these political concerns for biblical hermeneutics in South Africa? Perhaps the best way to reply is by asking whether or not Mosala's insistence on the hermeneutical grid of the black working class is still necessary, given that South Africa is now no longer in the Apartheid epoch. Is it still valid to formulate and articulate a biblical hermeneutic in racial-ideological terms? Can we, for example, not simply talk in non-racial terms of a post-Apartheid working class as opposed to a *black* working class?

A more important critique of Mosala's method in terms of its validity for a post-

Apartheid South Africa is raised by a traditionally-classified white Dutch Reformed Old Testament scholar, Ferdinand Deist. Deist (1992) does not critique Mosala directly, but the issues Deist raises have important implications for the Mosala method of approaching the study of the Old Testament in South Africa.

Without underestimating or degrading the contribution of European and American scholarship to Old Testament studies, Deist (1992:315) laments the absence of an *African* reading of the Old Testament, noting that "we have not produced anything typically South African, as the Germans, Americans and Scandinavians developed typically German, American and Scandinavian approaches." It sounds as though Deist is looking for a homogenous type of South African approach, since he makes reference to the German, American, Scandinavian approaches. In response to such a critique Deist has said:

> I am not for a moment implying that we will speak with one voice, just like the "Americans, and "the Scandanavians" speak with various voices, but as a group of scholars they have made an identifiable difference to the scholarly debate. That, I think, we can do as good as anybody else by getting our *own African debate* going (*personal correspondence with Deist, 15 April 1994*).

What then is meant by an *African* reading of the biblical text? At this point Deist himself is not very clear. The overarching issue for Deist is that we move away from racially exclusivist readings. What he also says is that:

> The Bible has been colonized and should, with Africa, be decolonized. In this process an African approach could make a major contribution (*personal correspondence with Deist*).

The question remains: What is it that makes a reading African? In terms of defining

African, Deist wishes to move beyond the black-white racial divide and prefers to talk in terms of "African and the peoples of Africa" (*personal correspondence with Deist*).

It is clear that the absence of a typically South African approach is, on one level, largely the result of a racially stratified society. One racial group has been allowed to monopolise the intellectual resources, dominating, as a result, the intellectual scene in South Africa (cf.Mazamisa 1993). We have noted above that the sociology of knowledge paradigm reminds us that all knowledge is shaped by socially-determined values. Put differently, we interpret the Bible from the vantage point of our experience. Therefore, given the diversity of the South African population and the different experiences of colonialism and apartheid, the search for a typically South African approach may be premature. In terms of a search for the *typical,* it is obvious that South Africans, black and white, share the history of forced racial separation, which has sometimes divided people who are members of the same socio-ethnic and religio-cultural group. It may be a long time before we are be able to see beyond the narrow categories of Apartheid segregation. While we may be able to do so ideologically speaking (cf.Biko 1986:48), the social and economic reality is that the vast majority of the most exploited of our land will read the text from a racially stratified position.

Deist's lament and proposal for an *African* reading takes us back to Mosala's *South African* reading of the Bible. It is clear that Mosala's materialist paradigm does take

seriously our African context. However, his point of departure is the economic exploitation of the black working class which he traces to the colonial period. Mosala's hermeneutic is African in the sense of taking seriously the African experience of colonial exploitation and the role of monopoly capitalism in our context. Deist's call for African reading(s) of the Old Testament moves more in the direction of a kind of non-exclusive ethnic-cultural analysis. While we share Deist's concern and hope for an African reading(s) of the Old Testament, we must not lose sight of the fact that, while we are on the African continent, our lives in many ways are determined by international socio-political-economic processes. Thus, in our search for authentic African readings of the Old Testament we must be careful not to overlook the way in which the mechanisms in our society which influence meaning are constructed, particularly given the diversified cultural context of South Africa and the legacy and history of exploitative racial capitalism in South Africa.

2.3 CONCLUSION

The brief synopsis of the biblical hermeneutical issues in South Africa during the Apartheid era, indicates very clearly the radical contrast in the hermeneutical orientations presupposed by Apartheid exegesis and that of resistance exegesis. It is still too early to predict the impact of the recent democratisation of South African society and its attendant structural changes on Old Testament scholarship in South Africa. What is certain is that there will be an ongoing discussion as to the relevance of the Bible, its character and function in a new political dispensation. In terms of the

kinds of concerns raised by Deist and the presuppositions of Mosala, it is going to be interesting to see to what extent white Old Testament scholars will argue for an African reading that would include a *white* African perspective. On the other hand, it remains to be seen to what extent and for how long Mosala's anti-Apartheid and revolutionary materialist exegetical method will continue to have relevance.

The literary-ideological method proposed by this study, in its attempt to make more explicit the ideological underpinnings of the text, defines its method more in terms of the form and content of the literature as opposed to the hermeneutical lens of the black working class. In effect, the literary-ideological paradigm takes Mosala's hermeneutic one stage further. Mosala's method has provided the general hermeneutical framework for an ideological-sensitive analysis of biblical literature. However, what happens when a black working class reader, as opposed to an academic hermeneutician engages in a reading of a biblical text like E-N? This is the challenge facing the present writer.

CHAPTER 3

TOWARDS A LITERARY-IDEOLOGICAL PARADIGM

In Chapter 2 above, an attempt is made to identify the elements of a literary-ideological paradigm for biblical exegesis, which is then located within the broader range of hermeneutical options presently informing South African biblical hermeneutics.

The present chapter builds upon and extends the South African hermeneutical discussion to an international theoretical base. The proposed literary-ideological paradigm, obviously, does not emerge in a methodological vacuum; the purpose of broadening the theoretical discussion, here, is to further develop the elements of a literary-ideological reading model into a sustainable exegetical alternative.

3.1 SOCIOLOGICAL EXEGESIS

The social scientific approach to the Bible is relatively new and, in many ways, still in its experimental phases, representing one of the many responses to the deficiencies of the historical-critical method. Goldingay (1990:189) notes that it has been only since the 1970's that the historical-critical method has begun to be seriously questioned and since the 1980's that social scientific disciplines like sociology and modern literary theory have become serious contenders in hermeneutical options for biblical exegesis. In many ways, the social scientific approach to the Bible can be considered an outgrowth of the historical-critical method in that:

> Clearly, the historical-critical method has been able to illuminate the collected

> writings of the Hebrew Bible, rooted in the history of Israel, as expressions of a religious faith unfolding in communal settings and historical sequences over more than a thousand years...[But]...exposed its limits when it could not...answer some historical questions adequately and when it was realised that new questions about the literary shape of the bible and the social milieu of ancient Israel were beyond its competency (Gottwald 1985:21).

The social science paradigm promises to expand the limits, with a new starting point. Biblical and all other kinds of texts are accepted consciously not only as historical or theological works, but also productions of particular *social* and *cultural* systems which give meaning to the texts. The Hebrew Bible is understood "as a social document that reflects the history of changing social structures, functions, and roles" and indeed provides a context "in which the literary, historical, and religious features of Israelite/Jewish people can be synoptically viewed and dynamically interconnected" (Gottwald 1985:22). Consequently, the structures and systems of the social context, themselves, need to be understood if we are to interpret the biblical texts accurately. It is, therefore, imperative that one's analysis must begin with the concrete historical and sociopolitical realities undergirding the text. Of course, one must presuppose that one is able to reconstruct the social reality behind the text with a fair amount of certainty. Reconstruction may proceed with a degree of reliability in New Testament studies (cf.Best 1983:183) but becomes more difficult for Old Testament studies, since the Old Testament has a much longer and more complex compositional history. Also, all such reconstruction attempts must of necessity remain open-ended, since they are but reconstructions. In sum:

> Sociological exegesis tries to situate a biblical book or subsection in its proper social setting - taking into account the literary and historical relations between

> the parts and the whole. It further attempts to illuminate the text according to its explicit or implied social referents, in a manner similar to the historical-critical method's clarification of the political and religious reference points of texts (Gottwald 1985:28-29).

While this may sound familiar to the historical-critical exegete, one important difference is to be noted: the social science method promises to move beyond historical analysis to an understanding of the texts as formations of particular social structures, processes and forces that have contemporary analogues. Gottwald's question regarding social scientific exegesis is a fundamental guide:

> What social structures and social processes are explicit or implicit in the biblical literature, in the scattered socio-economic data it contains, in the overtly political history it recounts, and in the religious beliefs and practices it attests (1985:26)?

Gottwald, of course, goes beyond the historical-critical method by suggesting that the social location of the reader is also critical to social scientific exegesis. The answers to the kinds of questions raised by Gottwald can only serve "as an antidote to the abstractions of the history of ideas and to the subjective individualism of existentialist hermeneutics" (Meeks 1982:2). The methodological implication is that any social science method which is applied to the biblical text has essentially two phases. First, it must concern itself with understanding the production and meaning of the text in relation to its socio-historical setting or, what Henry J. Cadbury terms, its *Weltanschauung* (in Kee 1980:11, 21-22). Second, it must then seek to interpret the evidence in a manner that is attuned and sympathetic to the ancient social world in which the text was produced (Kee 1980:8) and not in terms of a reality that is uniform

and universal (cf.Soulen 1981:87-88). An underlying premise of the social scientific paradigm is that *social forces* directly provide indispensable answers regarding the social and religious meanings of texts (Malina 1983:11; cf.Malina and Neyrey 1988:145; Turner 1978:13-14).

Since the primary task of an exegete is to interpret ancient texts functioning as units of meaning, the social scientific biblical exegete must try to imagine the way in which the meanings relate to each other, in terms of the persons, things, and events of the past that embodied meanings (Malina 1983:16). The interpretive agenda requires that practitioners of the social science method insist on the necessity of definite models of interpretation. Thus, social science disciplines are:

> based upon models of how the world of human interaction works and why it works that way. Specifically, the social sciences look to how meanings are imposed on men and women to seek to explain human behavior in terms of typicalities (Malina 1983:15).

Elliot provides added content to the concept of 'models' by saying:

> Models are...conceptual vehicles for articulating, applying, testing, and possibly reconstructing theories used in the analysis and interpretation of specific social data. The difference between a model and an analogy lies in the fact that the model is *consciously structured*, and *systematically arranged* in order to serve as a *speculative instrument* for the purpose of organization, profiling, and interpreting a complex welter of detail (Elliot 1986:5).

Within the social sciences, there are three basic models that can guide the exegete: These may be described as: 1) the structural-functional model commonly associated with the sociologists Emilé Durkheim and Max Weber, which emphasises social order and harmony; 2) the materialist or conflict model commonly associated with Marxist

sociology, which analyses social reality in terms of social conflict, struggle and change; 3) the symbolic-interaction model, which interprets social behavior on the basis of shared socio-cultural meanings and values (*see* Malina 1982; cf.Burden 1993:207-209). The choice of a model is largely dependant on the kinds of information one wants to extract from the literature. More important, each model presupposes a different theory of the way in which society functions in terms of the nexus of politics, religion, economics and other social/sociological phenomena.

3.2 *NEW* LITERARY CRITICISM

While the debate continues as to which sociological model best describes social reality, scholars representing *new* literary criticism have made their own critique of the models in general. They rightly point out that the sociological models or *conceptual vehicles*, as Elliot calls them, lay a lot of stress on the reconstruction of the social world of the texts at the expense of literary considerations and risk not only sociological reductionism, but especially the subordination of literary concerns (cf.Gottwald 1985:21,21-26; cf.Macky 1986:263-279; Jobling 1986). In other words, the social science methods and models tend to subordinate the power of meaning in the written texts to the agenda of historical or socio-cultural interests.

Thus, in contrast to a focus on sociological phenomena, the new literary critics wish to give primary attention to "the depth dimension" or "literary/aesthetic dimension" of the Bible which has long been neglected (Macky 1986: 267,269; cf.Via 1967; Wilder

1971; Ryken 1974; Perrin 1976; Tolbert 1979; Ricoeur 1976; Croatto 1987). Gottwald summarises the fundamental premise of this paradigm:

> ... the text as it stands constitutes the proper object of study in that it offers a total, self-contained, literary meaning that need not depend upon analysis of sources, historical commentary, or normative religious interpretations (Gottwald 1985:22).

Major issues that emerge are whether or not the text as it stands does in fact have a self-contained meaning and whether or not a text has singular or multiple meanings, which is essentially a debate between the structuralist/formalist and deconstructionist approaches. Ina Gräbe, after comparing and contrasting formalist and deconstructionist literary strategies, comments on the deconstructionist approach by saying:

> It follows that if one wishes to embrace a deconstructive strategy for the reading of literary texts, one should perhaps ask oneself whether the objective of reading can then still be an attempt to arrive at a possible understanding and interpretation of literature (Ina Gräbe 1990:50).

This critique becomes more poignant in the light of comments made by Hunter, a deconstructionist, who points out that it is nearly impossible to penetrate the meanings of words and expressions if the interpreter has not delimited him or herself in terms of literary theory. Hunter (1991:371) says that the most probable meanings from texts are dependent on the interpreter's choice of the delimitation in the writing and not on a fixed context supplied by the text. Is the only meaning of a text that which we give to it *vis-a-vis* the delimited method? Is there no objective meaning to the text?

The search for the objective, single meaning of the text, as in the case of the

historical-critical method, is also beset with problems, be it undergirded by the linguistic structuralism derived from F. de Saussure or the anthropological structuralism generally associated with C. Levi Strauss.

While the methodological debate within newer literary criticism will no doubt continue, a word of critique from outside the paradigm may be in order. The technical jargon notwithstanding, the deemphasis of the historical and social aspects of the text is problematic (Deist 1983, 1990; Gottwald 1985:25-26; West 1991). What the new literary criticism paradigm does, however, is to raise to a new level, as well as to sharpen, the debate concerning the meanings of biblical texts and the sources of such meanings.

3.3 THE SOCIO-LITERARY APPROACH

Both the sociological and the new literary paradigms represent radical challenges and alternatives to the dogma of the historical-critical method which reflect polarising tendencies. Gottwald, recognising the tendency, reminds us that we need to affirm that the Bible is indeed a literary as well as a social world. Such a relationship raises another set of hard questions:

> How might literary structure and social structure be more exactly related? If, on the one hand, literary critics insist that social context has no bearing on texts and if, on the other hand, anthropological and sociological critics claim that texts are pure and simple projections of social life and consciousness, it is likely that points of contact between them will be minimal at best and hostile at worst (Gottwald 1985:30).

What then is a solution that does justice to both the literary and sociological dimensions of the biblical text? It is fairly clear that each of the paradigms has limitations (*see* Rohrbaugh 1993). Are we simply to live with the limitations and remain methodological purists, indeed isolationists? Methodological pluralism seems to be the answer, while involving the making of choices with respect to meta-theoretical presuppositions and conceptual models. Gottwald describes his own methodological choices in an explicit way:

> Within newer literary criticism I take account of its several forms, namely the Bible as literature, rhetorical and stylistic criticism, and structural analysis. Within social scientific criticism I attend to those aspects of anthropological and sociological method and theory that have been most crucial for biblical studies" (Gottwald 1985:xxvii).

Gottwald's narrowing of choices still does not limit or adequately define his method and leaves the question on method extremely open-ended. His explicit methodological clarification of choices nevertheless captures the task facing exegetical work which wants to take seriously both the literary and the socio-historical dimensions of the text. The exegete will more than likely discover that more than one paradigm may be appropriate, *even necessary*, in order to answer a single question. There must, therefore, exist a good deal of fluidity between paradigms if one is going to do justice to the nature of the biblical text. The methodological problems attached to such fluidity are enormous and are never far in the background. The exegete must consistently ask:

> By what rules do we leap from one [method] to the other? How are we to bring together the results from two or more methods of inquiry to provide a synthesis that is more than an arbitrary pasting together of unrelated elements

> together the results from two or more methods of inquiry to provide a synthesis that is more than an arbitrary pasting together of unrelated elements (Gottwald 1985:34)?

There is no doubt that a socio-literary approach has the potential to be a creative nexus between two major paradigms, literary and historical, each of which has sub-groups of its own, each hitherto operating almost in total methodological isolation of the other. The choice of exegetical strategy is invariably dictated by the subjective interests of the modern interpreter. Thus, the kinds of questions posed to the text will invariably determine how one combines the paradigms and models.

The overall value of a socio-literary paradigm is that it holds together both the literary and the sociological aspects of the text. Too often one aspect is analysed to the exclusion of the other, if not in juxtaposition to the other. However, in the quest to interpret the literary, historical and ideological aspects of E-N, with the imperial decrees serving as a literary and ideological hermeneutical grid, the exegete must develop and/or choose a literary theory, a concept of ideology and a socio-historical model which will move E-N studies beyond its present methodological impasse. It is argued by this study that the complicated compositional history of the E-N text, the literary problems plaguing the literature, and the paucity of sociological data necessitates the development of an exegetical approach which will move E-N beyond the methodological impasse currently characterising E-N research. One such methodological proposal is a *literary-ideological reading strategy* developed by this study.

3.4 DEFINING A LITERARY-IDEOLOGICAL MODE OF READING

A literary-ideological paradigm has as its primary interest the ideological character and function of a text. It is a mode of reading aimed at giving expression to the nexus of the political ideology and the religio-cultural dynamics reflected by the dialectical relationship between the formal structure and content of a text. As stated in Chapter 2 above, where we provided a general orientation, this mode of reading must not be misunderstood as an exclusively *literary* analytical/exegetical method. On the contrary, a literary-ideological mode of reading takes into account the crucial impact on literary production and meaning of 'forces' such as politics, power and ideology, and thereby attempts to make explicit how these 'forces' inscribe themselves on a text.

3.4.1 The legacy of Karl Marx.

Of the many analytical approaches to the study of literature (Walder 1990; Eagleton 1983), the Marxist methodological paradigm is the most useful in assisting the formulation of a reading strategy for the E-N literature. This is so because a Marxist literary paradigm (albeit a much debated area of study) is one which wrestles most vigorously with the nature of the relationship between literature and ideology. It is therefore necessary to indicate, explicitly, the manner in which a literary-ideological paradigm appropriates Marx's thought and subsequent Marxist literary theorists (cf. Kolakowski 1978; Erlich 1973). It is also important to recognise that this study is not the first to appropriate elements of a Marxist-based method of (biblical) textual and theological analysis. Christian theological studies which appropriate a Marxist social

analysis by far outnumber those within the discipline of textual (biblical) studies. The ground-breaking work of Gutiérrez (1988) is considered a classic in this regard. Biblical scholars such as Clévenot, Belo, Gottwald, Mosala have, in varying ways, enlisted certain elements of Marxist methodology in their hermeneutical and exegetical method. My intention is to build on these approaches which serve as necessary correctives to established (exegetical) methods which either evade, or are in no position of answering issues relative to power and ideology.

The appropriation of Marxist methodology for biblical studies, of course, does not occur in a methodological vacuum. Biblical scholars in turn (e.g. Mosala and Gottwald) are indebted to Marxist literary theoreticians such as Eagleton, Jameson, Macherey and others. Similarly, any formulation of a literary-ideological mode of reading is gravely deficient if void of interacting with Marxist literary theorists who, in their own way have interpreted and appropriated Marx's thought on literature and ideology.

The ongoing debate among Marxist literary and social theorists is largely due to the fact that Marx himself does not provide us with an unambiguous and systematically worked out theory of literary or ideology (cf. Slaughter 1980:22; Baxandall 1983:284). This has left the field wide open for an interpretation of Marx on literature (*see e.g.* Mulhern 1992; Frow 1986; Tilley (ed) 1990; Slaughter 1980; Lifshitz 1973; Demetz 1959; Craig 1975; Eagleton 1976a, 1976b; Marcusse 1978; Goldmann 1964;

Jameson 1971, 1981; Macherey 1978). The same holds true for discussions on ideology, with bibliographical material in no short supply (*see e.g.* Althusser 1984; Larrain 1979, 1983; Parekh 1982; Rattansi 1989; Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies 1978; cf. Giddens & Held (ed) 1982.)

The question of ideology and literature is complex and, in a short chapter of a larger study such as this, we can only give an indication of those critical features which impact the construction of our literary-ideological paradigm for reading the E-N literature, perhaps for biblical literature in general. It is instructive to note that at no point in his life was Marx concerned exclusively with either ideology or literature and therefore it becomes necessary to excavate from Marx's writings his views on these subjects. Understandably, any reading of Marx must locate his thought and writings within the context of their production. To this end, various schematics have been proposed to best understand the thought of Marx's intellectual pilgrimage and context. Larrain (1983) and John Thompson (1990) offers a useful schema of three significant phases in the development of Marx's thought on ideology, in particular, while McLellan (1977) suggests a more detailed five stage outline covering the whole of Marx's thought, in general.

Lee Baxandall and Stefan Morawski's selection and ordering of Marx's and Engels' writings on literature and art have a similar intention, namely to make their scattered thoughts on literary theory more accessible. Their small volume is a welcome attempt

at helping the literary theorist work through the rather monumental and dense writings of Marx and Engels on the subject (*see* Marx & Engels 1973). While Marx's writings do reflect scattered, and often fragmentary, comments of art and literature, a helpful orientation to interpreting Marx is the work of Mikhail Lifshitz. Eagleton could not have been more accurate in his assessment of Lifshitz' work:

> ... Lifshitz implicitly undermines the case that the scattered, often fragmented nature of Marx's comments on art and literature reflects a merely casual, empirical, intermittent interest in the subject on Marx's part, and that this is the sinister consequence of 'putting economics' first (Lifshitz 1976:7).

An understanding, then, of Marx's views on literature and ideology requires rather exhaustive primary source research so as to locate Marx's thought within the wider context of its production - an exercise beyond the scope of this study. *(For a useful orientation consult McLellan 1980a; 1980b.)* Only the broad outlines of Marx's thought are repeated here to demonstrate the extent to which a literary-ideological paradigm borrows and adapts aspects of his theory.

Central concepts in Marx's thought: Marx's early views on religion foreshadows central elements of his concept of ideology and literature (Larrain 1983:14), which orthodox Marxist-Leninists discount as not being representative of the real Marx, i.e. the older (mature) economic determinist (McLellan 1977:1). In his survey of the development of Marxist thought, McLellan (1977:10) reminds us that Althusser, for example, stresses a discontinuity between the first (young) and the second (mature) Marx by talking of an "epistemological break" between these stages (For a critique of

Althusser's position see McLellan 1977:229; Kolakowski 1978 vol.III:486f.).

E.P.Thompson maintains that:

> Althusser is of course right that Marx's thought came together into a new kind of totality in the late 1840's; and that those seminal concepts present in earlier writings, of essence and existence, of alienation, of civil and political society, are afforded new meanings within the newly discovered context of historical materialism (E.P. Thompson 1978:142).

Thus, in getting to grips with Marx, there are, however, two components which in a fundamental way affects every other aspect of his life and thought, namely dialectical and historical materialism (*see* Marx, Engels, Lenin 1984; cf.Aronowitz 1982). In the afterword to the second German edition of *Capital*, Marx responds to a critique concerning his method:

> My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain ... is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of 'the Idea'. With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought (Marx 1954:29).

In *The German Ideology,* Marx provides further content to his understanding of materiality in an oft quoted paragraph containing the now famous dictum: *Life is **not** determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life.* If consciousness is in fact determined by the materiality of life, what then influences the materiality of life? Does the materiality of life enjoy an autonomous existence? For Marx the answer lies in the nature of economic relations of society:

> As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with what they produce and with how they produce. The nature of the individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production (Marx, Engels, Lenin 1984:18).

Since the nature of the individual is determined by material conditions, so too is the consciousness of the individual:

> The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behaviour. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc., of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc. - real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men in their life-process. If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-processes (Marx, Engels, Lenin 1984:22).

In *The Communist Manifesto* of 1847-48, Marx expresses his belief that all human consciousness stems from material conditions:

> Does it require deep intuition to comprehend that man's ideas, views, and conceptions, in one word, man's consciousness, changes with every change in his material existence, in his social relation and in his social life? (Marx & Engels 1986:51).

These and other similar statements, collectively, allow some interpreters to accuse Marx of being a crude economic determinist (e.g. Alister Kee 1990; *see* Lash 1981) and serve as key passages for the orthodox Marxist-Leninist school. It is interesting that Engels, Marx's close friend and confidant, and thereby the foremost interpreter of Marx to the world after Marx's death, defends Marx against accusations of crude determinism. In a letter to J. Bloch in 1890, Engels writes:

> According to the materialist conception of history, the *ultimately* determining element in history is the production and reproduction of life. *More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted.* Hence if somebody twists this into

> saying that the economic element is the *only* determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract senseless phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure-political forms...juridical forms, and even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the participants...religious views and their further development into systems of dogmas- also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form. There is an interaction of all these elements in which ... the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary.
>
> We make history ourselves, but, in the first place, under very definite assumptions and conditions. Among these the economic ones are ultimately decisive ([italics mine] Marx & Engels 1986:682).

Implications of Marx for a literary-ideological paradigm: The crucial question at this point is this: Did Engels accurately *represent* the essential thought of Marx or do we see here the earliest *reinterpretation* of Marx? This study holds the latter view to be the case, in addition to the view that the roots of dialectical materialism in subsequent Marxist thought are to be fundamentally located in Engels. The overall logic reflected in Marx's writings make it difficult to interpret Marx outside of the methodological camp of strict social and economic determinism. This is not to say that some of Marx's texts reveal ambiguities. (*See my discussion below on Ideology*).

Engels' possible reinterpretation (as opposed to representation) of Marx's thought notwithstanding, there is certainly a consensus that Marx's theoretical method reorients and arrests historical analysis from the idealist premise of his Hegelian opponents to a modified version of Feuerbachian materialism. The extent to which the economic base determines and/or is dialectically related to the superstructure remains an ongoing debate.

Marx on literature: How does all this impact our constructing of the literary component of a literary-ideological mode of reading the E-N literature? For Marx and Engels, literature, like art, was considered part of the ideological superstructure of society. Thus, in terms of the general logic of Marx's theory of materialism, literature, indeed the ideas, produced in any society is of necessity a reflection, indeed a product of society's economic relations i.e. its material base. Another oft quoted passage of Marx explains his position in regard to the ruling class and ruling consciousness:

> The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling *material* force of society. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as idea; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one therefore, the ideas of its dominance (Marx, Engels, Lenin 1984:44).

Literature *per se*, therefore becomes what can be called a 'weapon' in the hands of the ruling class, thereby not only disseminating the ideology of the dominant classes of society but maintaining the status quo. As a general statement, to steer us through the many twists and turns of Marx's exhaustive analysis of the production of ruling class ideology, it might be fairly accurate to state that for Marx, literary production is a form of ideological production.

A possible short coming, if not methodological myopia, in Marx's theoretical rumblings is tied directly to his theory of history. He does not account adequately how the contradictions within the capitalist mode of production will eventually give rise to

conditions wherein the proletariat class will ultimately overcome the bourgeois class. If indeed changes in the processes of history occur as a result of the internal contradictions in the modes of production, why then the necessity for combined revolutionary praxis on the part of the proletariat and their organic revolutionary intellectuals to overcome exploitation and oppression by the bourgeoisie (noting that the matter of organic intellectuals is a later development within Marxist thought)? In this regard the production and function of literature take on significant proportions. If, according to my reading of Marx, the function of literature and its attendant ideological content is the exclusive domain of the ruling class the fact that Marx himself was able to produce revolutionary literature creates a methodological quagmire and begs the question.

Earlier we mentioned the diverse interpretations of Marxist thought including, Althusser, who argues for an epistemological break between the young and mature Marx. Larrain who has developed a helpful schematic in and by which to locate Marx's thought on ideology clearly states how he begins to account for Marx's thought on ideology:

> I follow an intermediate path; that acknowledges the need to consider the concept of ideology within the whole context of Marx's intellectual development, and takes into account the existence of well-demarcated stages in that evolution. At the same time, however, it recognises a basic coherence and unity which rules out any dramatic break (Larrain 1983:9).

Larrain then proceeds to outline the various stages in the intellectual development of Marx's thinking on ideology, namely:

(1837-44) ... the humanistic and philosophical Marx engaged in a radical critique of Hegelian idealism. [Significant writings: Marx's Doctoral Thesis (1838-1841); Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right (1843)].

(1845-57) ... the development of historical materialism initiated by a break with Feuerbach. [Significant writings: Theses on Feuerbach (1845); The German Ideology (1846); Community Manifesto (1848)].

(1858-83) ... begins with Grundrisse and ends with his political writings where the primary concern is with a detailed analysis of capitalist social relations. [Significant writings: Grundrisse (1858); Preface to The Critique of Political Economy (1859); Capital II & III (1863).

The first and second stages reflects a reactionary mode of discourse. Marx was not only dissatisfied with Hegelian idealism but became preoccupied with a determinism to shatter the premises of his Hegelian counterparts. Marx accused his opponents of gravely overestimating the value and role of ideas in historical-social life. Therefore, Marx's main accomplishment in the first stage, was showing the Hegelians that they confuse ideas for causes rather than effects and that they have misunderstood the character of the social-historical world.

In the second stage, Marx constructs a theory of historical materialism resulting in a radical break with Feuerbachian materialism. Having carved a *niche* within the market place of critical social theory, Marx develops, for the first time, his notion of ideology within the context of discussing ruling class consciousness. This is the context out of which the now famous dictum in *The German Ideology* emerges, viz. *The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas*. For Marx, the real problems of society are not mistaken ideas (*contra* Hegelians), but real social contradictions

(*contra* Feuerbach). Thus the primary thrust of Marx's thought is his assumption of the social determinism of social consciousness, which in turn is a product of contradictions within the economic forces at the material base of society.

It was in the 1859 Preface to the *Contribution of Political Economy*, where Marx develops these notions of ideology more fully, while at the same time introducing profound theoretical innovations to his ideology theory up until this time. The innovation was the notion that ideology was dependent and derived from the economic conditions and relations of production. In the Preface Marx writes:

> In the social production of their life, men (*sic*) enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness (Marx & Engels 1986:181).

What is clear is that Marx links in a fundamental way the production and diffusion of ideas to the relation between classes. The theoretical assumption here is that economic conditions of production are distinguishable from the superstructure and ideological forms of consciousness. The economic conditions of society should be regarded as the principle means of explaining social-historical transformations. An important distinctive here is the notion that ideological forms of consciousness are not to be taken at face value since they, by definition, conceal and distort (mystify) the true nature of economic relations on which society is premised. Therefore, since ideology is illusory, it is false and must be unmasked.

Stage three of Marx's intellectual development is qualitatively different from the previous stages in that Marx no longer debates the merits of his materialist philosophy of history, believing he has settled on a theoretical level. *[But has Marx really settled the theoretical issues? We will return to this matter below when we discuss in more detail the implications of the events surrounding the coup d'état in France, recorded in* The Eighteenth Brumaire *(1852).*] There is a sense in which the third stage in Marx's intellectual development can be seen as an attempt to unmask and demystify the ideological superstructure of society. Instead of reacting, Marx is now proactive in his writing, engaging in an analysis of the economic relations of society, producing monumental analyses such as *Das Kapital* - analyses not merely aimed at interpreting but indeed changing the world.

What then can we say by way of summarising the thought of Marx on ideology. Here we want to make four points by way of summary. *First,* we note that, ideology for Marx is a form of consciousness to be distinguished from other forms of consciousness (including ideas, real knowledge, scientific knowledge, false knowledge, error, scientific language). *Second*, ideology emerges from the material conditions of society. *Third*, ideology conceals material conditions - it plays a role in reproducing a system of class domination by hiding (distorting) the true relations between classes by explaining away the relations of domination and subordination. In this way ideology legitimates the class structure of society. *Fourth*, ideology serves

the interests of the ruling class even if it has not been produced by that class, which by definition means that there cannot be an ideology that serves the interests of the oppressed classes of society. Marx therefore had a very negative view of ideology because it involved distortion of the real struggles; ideology misrepresent the contradictions of society and as such is false - hence ideology is a form of false consciousness which needs to be unmasked.

3.4.2 Biblical Hermeneutics and Marxist Theory:

While Marx considered religion to be the opiate of the masses (false consciousness, if you will), thereby one of the major stumbling blocks in the way of true liberation, Christian liberation theologians using the Marxist method, ironically, argue the contrary. It is argued that true liberation from oppression cannot come about by suppressing or ignoring religion and its scriptures. Segundo, a liberation theologian, perceptively comments:

> Somehow, Marx does not seem to have ever entertained the suspicion that ideology could have warped the thinking of the theologians and interpreters of scripture so that they ended up unwittingly interpreting it in a sense that served the interest of the ruling classes. Marx does not seem to have shown much interest in trying to find out whether distortion had crept into the Christian message and whether a new interpretation favouring the class struggle of the proletariat might be possible or even necessary (Segundo 1976:19).

Biblical scholars such as Miranda (1974), Clévenot (1985), Belo (1981), Gottwald (1979, 1985, 1992), Füssel (1983) and Mosala (1989) have indeed appropriated, in varying degrees, Marxist literary and social theory for their analysis of biblical literature. Michel Clévenot (1985), in defining a materialist approach to the Bible as

understood in his French context, is unambiguous about his use of Marx to define his exegetical parameters quoting extensively from Marx's *The German Ideology*.

William J. Nottingham, in his Foreword to Clévenot's *Materialist Approaches to the Bible*, provides an interpretive commentary on Clévenot's appropriation of Marx's theory of materialism which is worth repeating here because of its clarity:

> "Materialist" refers to the view of history and culture that Marxist social theory has popularised. It means that all consciousness is produced materially or by the material conditions in which people live, particularly by the kind of work they do and the social class to which they belong. In other words, a materialist approach does not allow for interpretations of life and experience from the standpoint of eternal truths or the will of God or abstract ideas working themselves out in daily life. The materialist approach means that a basic assumption about methods of historical understanding has been made, consisting of the attempt to discern how power is used overtly or subtly to dominate, brainwash, or exploit classes of people (Clévenot 1985:ix).

In a comment of methodological procedure, Clévenot makes two very important points pertinent to the development of a literary-ideological mode of reading:

> ...strictly speaking, there is no "method" of a materialist reading in the sense of a universally valid scientific system. What is scientific in our approaches is that, beginning with clearly defined hypotheses, we experiment, correct, and improve the procedures of our work ... [Furthermore] materialist readings presuppose two things: (a) that we take as our point of departure the present struggles in which we are involved, so that we can *reread the texts that have woven our history and free them from those who have used them to legitimize their own power; (b) that we take seriously the "materiality" of the text, which can be seen as the product of a practice of language (whose material is linguistic) situated in class struggles and within the dominant ideology of a given social structure*. This means that language is considered to be an area of historical materialism, and that the reading of the text brings in to play at the same time both language and history ([italics mine] Clévenot 1985:xi).

Indicative of a sensitivity to issues of power, politics and ideology in biblical literature and exegesis are the types of questions Gottwald poses to the biblical text. Writing

from within a North American context, he ploughs the biblical text seeking answers to questions such as:

> Who controls what is produced? Who can persuade or compel others to do what they want and by what means? Whose ideas and interpretations of common life prevail? What limits in production, politics, and ideology are set by the environment and by the preceding interplay of social forces as they impinge on the moment (Gottwald 1992:82)?

Mosala, in his formulation of black theology and black biblical hermeneutics relevant for the South African context of biblical scholarship, makes explicit his indebtedness to Karl Marx:

> I have chosen the historical-material method of analysis usually associated with the name Karl Marx rather than the idealistic framework that makes the history of ideas-abstracted from concrete historical relationships-the focus of its analysis (Mosala 1989:4).

Mosala, like Clévenot, denounces the ideological captivity of Western exegetical assumptions and tries to reconstruct a hermeneutic that is analytically and theoretically free from Western-idealist assumptions. Whether Mosala or even Clévenot is able to escape ideological captivity is questionable (*see* my discussion and critique in Chapter 2 above). Our suspicion that Mosala has fallen prey to methodological myopia does not diminish, substantially, his contribution to critical biblical scholarship. Mosala insists that:

> If black theology *and black biblical hermeneutics* is to become an effective weapon in the struggle to critique and transform present realities, it needs to employ concepts that can get to the bottom of real events, relationships, structures, and so forth...Only such an exposure of the underlying material relationships can throw light on the problems of which the biblical texts are a solution and can enable black theology to become the kind of critical discourse that is capable of contributing meaningfully to black liberation struggle ([italics mine] (Mosala 1989:4-5).

Mosala is in agreement with Clévenot that there is a plurality of forms and uses of historical-materialist methods. However, there are areas in which historical-materialism, in its classical form, is *deficient*. He, therefore, adds the dimension of cultural, racial, and gender relationships as part of the material relationships within the historical-materialist paradigm (Mosala 1989:5; *see also* Aronowitz 1982:330-331). In spite of the need to add some previously overlooked material relationships, Mosala nevertheless finds solace in the fact that "most, if not all, of the materialist-exegetical and hermeneutical studies of the Bible that we have seen in recent times share this ideological orientation to real political struggles" (1989:103).There is no reason to doubt that such struggles can be detected in the biblical text. Mosala, then, when moving to interrogate the biblical text, sharpens his methodological scalpel by posing some poignant questions to the text:

> What is the nature of the challenge of these texts? Whose class, gender, and race interests does this challenge exist to serve? Who is making the challenge? Where and when? What are the ideological and literary mechanisms whereby the challenge is formulated? What effects, then and now, are these texts having on the social classes, genders, and races on whose behalf they were *not* produced (Mosala 1989:131)?

What the above discussion illustrates, among others, is that the hermeneutical and exegetical approaches of biblical scholars such as Mosala, Gottwald and Clévenot, are dependent on Marxist social theory, and as such are geared toward connecting the exegete with the struggles ***behind*** the biblical text (*see* West 1991:107-117). Thus, the type of analysis they propose attempts, in varying degrees, to make explicit the ideological content in the interpretation of biblical texts. They do this with two

important presuppositions; first a commitment to the liberation of the oppressed and second, by giving priority to the constructing the material base of the text. It is for this reason that the overarching orientation of biblical scholarship that has used a Marxist method has been more concerned with matters archaeological and historical as opposed to more narrow literary concerns. With reference to the strong emphasis on historical analysis, these scholars have not only interpreted, but appropriated Marx in terms of strict social and economic determinism (Gottwald 1979:632-633; Clévenot 1985:xi; Mosala 1989:103), concurring with Marx that *how a society produces and reproduces itself is fundamentally conditioned by its mode of production.* Do we see here evidence of an uncritical appropriation of Marx, noting above that Marxist scholars themselves are divided as to whether Marx himself espoused a strict (crude) economic determinist?

The implications of a Marxist-based method of exegetical analysis for E-N is no doubt an attractive option especially with its determination to understand the nexus of politics, power, ideology and how these become/became imprinted in the biblical text. However, there are some rather serious methodological matters, while needing to be resolved, nevertheless remain difficult to resolve. For example, in terms of method, historical materialist analysis presupposes a thorough knowledge of material reality. It further presupposes that we have sufficient data from which to reconstruct, with certainty, the material reality (socio-economic base) of a particular text. Are data of the necessary quality and quantity actually available (accessible?) for a reconstruction

of the material realities like, for example, the early Second Temple period in which the E-N text is set? Can we (re)construct and/or understand the E-N text solely from the contradictions inherent in the material base of early Second Temple society when we are uncertain and lack sufficient material artifacts for reconstructing such a base? It seems that, in terms of traditional Marxism, we are facing a methodological dilemma.

A way out of the methodological dilemma is to remind ourselves that Marxist criticism is a radical attempt to understand the ideas, values and feelings (ideologies) by which humanity experiences its societies at various times, and which are available to us sometimes, as in the case of E-N, **only** in literary form. In this regard Eagleton helps to raise a very important matter concerning the interplay between Marxist literary theory and the E-N text. If, indeed, the fundamental premise of Marxist literary criticism is that of trying to understand literature in terms of the history that has produced it, what do we do when the only history we possess of the society is embedded in the very text which describes the history? What if, in addition, the text is unashamedly biased and considered historically unreliable? Biblical scholarship has graphically catalogued the literary and historical problems surrounding the E-N literature, hence the analytical impasse currently characterising E-N research (*see* Chapter 1 above). From a methodological point of view, we must ask whether or not it is at all possible to first extract the *objective* and *verifiable* historical data from the already interpretation-loaded text in order to reconstruct the history *behind* the text

and, then, to interpret that same text against such an historical reconstruction? If not, is the alternative an analysis of the text for its own intrinsic value ignoring the historical dimensions to which it relates? Herein lies the tension that needs to be resolved when developing a methodological paradigm for a study of the E-N text - a paradigm which holds in creative tension literary, historical-material and ideological concerns as part of the exegetical process. To an already-complicated situation must be added the difficult question of the locus of textual meaning. Where is the locus of meaning of the E-N text? Is meaning embedded in the text itself, fixed by the intention of the author, or does meaning emerge from the interaction of text and context (Rohrbaugh 1993:222)?

It has already been observed that E-N contains the only biblical *history* of the Jews for its period (539-332 B.C.E.). There are no other biblical data. In addition, the non-biblical and archaeological sources guiding our reconstructions are sparse (Widengren 1977:495-503). How then is one to interpret the E-N literature in terms of the history that has produced it, with reference to its material base, given the lack of sociological data?

A useful way forward, particularly as it relates to E-N, seems to be a (re)construction of the material base of the society, initially from the ideology signified by the form and structure of the text. In this way we will probably be able to more adequately identify the social forces impacting the text and its context, an exegetical manoeuvre

hitherto absent from E-N exegetical studies. Since *modes of production* are fundamental to a Marxist theory of history (i.e. since history is not moved solely or even primarily by abstracted ideas, but by human labour or at least changes in human labour), the task facing any appropriation of a Marxist-based analytical (exegetical) method for E-N is to take seriously the paucity of the data (especially the socio-economic data) on which so much of the analysis depends. [*See Chapter 7 below, which discusses the methodological problems concerning a reconstruction of the material conditions of the E-N text.*]

Füssel, a biblical scholar who pays more attention to the literary (as opposed to the historical) dimensions of Marxist-based exegesis, is helpful at this point. He defines literature in terms of being a form of ideological production and hence his definition of literature is in terms of its *function*. He writes:

> Like every other ideological production literary production is determined by the relation between basis and superstructure and by the class struggle. The production of texts is the privileged field of the conflict between the rival ideologies at work on a social formation. The basic structure of literary texts emerges from consideration of this primary contradiction (Füssel 1983:141).

Füssel further explains, that:

> ...literature is to be understood as the product of social praxis and derives its character from the relationships at work in each instance ... A materialist theory of literature identifies types of texts and genres of texts as variations within a general social determination of literary form, and analyzes the religious, political, juridical and other themes of a text in light of its function. This emphasis on the objective character of literature as a reflection of real life means the rejection of an attitude that regards literature as resulting from the genius or even the fully mysterious creativity of individuals ... *Literary texts are not simply mental products of material life but rather themselves in their*

turn play a part in shaping this life ([italics mine] Füssel 1983:142).

The important key in Füssel's understanding of a materialist theory of literature is the notion of *function*, which one understands or discovers by analysing its themes, some of which Füssel has identified as being religious, political and juridical. The identification of themes, however, depends on the kinds of information the exegete is looking for. In other words, there is a sense in which the text can be made to say things that it initially was not intended to say, if that original intention were ever recoverable. We are left to make intelligent guesses as to what the original intention of the writer might have been, especially since all we have, in the case of E-N, is a text which is the final product of many stages, if not of different hands.

While we agree with Füssel that we need to look at the text in terms of themes, the crucial question is this: who decides what those *themes* should be and by what criteria? It is at this level of decision that we can know the text in a way that the text will never know itself, perhaps also in a way that the text was never intended to be understood in the first instance!

We have suggested that one way out of the methodological stalemate in E-N studies is to reorient our exegetical activities around questions about power, politics and ideology as they relate to the imperial decrees. We have suggested that the imperial decrees are the fundamental hermeneutical keys in terms of understanding the nature of the E-N literature. Literature must certainly be seen as having a relationship to the

dominant way of seeing the world which is the "social mentality" or ideology of an age (Eagleton 1976a:6). The ideology, in turn, is the product of the concrete social relationships into which human beings enter at a particular time and place. Consequently, humans are not free to choose their social relations. Rather, social relations are constrained into time and space out of material necessity - by the nature and stage of development of the mode of production (Eagleton 1976a:6). The meaning for E-N is that, in order to understand the E-N text, we must do more than to interpret the symbolism of the text and positively much more than simply describe its literary and compositional character. We must first of all understand the complex, indirect relationships between E-N and the ideological world it inhabits *viz.* the Persian colonial context. It is possibly the particular ideological world views which can be extracted from the *form* (image, style, rhythm, quality) in which it is presented in the literature. Ideology certainly has a definite but historically relative structure of perception which underpins the power of a particular social class and, indeed, that class's presentation or view of reality. It must be added parenthetically that the challenge facing a Marxist literary critic is to expose the perception of ideology with the aim of ultimately transforming society into a more *just* place, a classless society. Without this qualification of purpose, Marxist literary theory is no better than the idealist theories which it wants to critique.

In this regard, Füssel understands literature to have what he calls a "practico-transformative" character, which means that literature can and does facilitate change

in society, and does not merely reflect the aspirations of the ruling class. Thus the domain of literary activity is broad and the key to understanding literature is to investigate the nature and function of a particular discourse within a particular setting. *(In the following section I will discuss, more intensely, the nature and function of literature)*. Interestingly, Füssel's view of literature helps answer the methodological quagmire we noted as characteristic of Marx's view of literature. Hence, literature is not bound to reflect, exclusively, the interests of the ruling class.

In sum, the limitations of the sociological data notwithstanding, a Marxist theory of history serves as a crucial guide in the formulation and articulation of a literary-ideological mode of reading a biblical text such as E-N. However, it seems necessary, to use as a starting point the text as opposed to the context of literature especially in the case of E-N.

3.4.3 Towards a theory of literature

The nature of literature: Literary theorists have in the same manner as the biblical scholars discussed above, clarified their own presuppositions and definitions *vis-a-vis* a Marxist literary theory. The ambiguities in Marx's thought, Engels reinterpretation thereof notwithstanding, force literary theorists, who wish to appropriate his method, to articulate, explicitly, their appropriation of Marx's thought. As a general consensus it seems permissible to say that Marxist literary theory says only that we analyse literature in terms of the historical/material conditions which produce it. Beyond such

a formulation one easily gets choked and could well drown in the details of aesthetic theory as debated among Marxist literary critics as they all attempt to formulate an *authentic* Marxist literary theory. Compounding the issue, as we noted above, is that we look in vain to Marx or Engels for a formulation of a complete aesthetic theory. The Marxist literary critic is therefore left with the challenge of formulating a literary theory which will best do justice to the *basic tenets* of Marx's thought, itself a matter of sharp debate. A helpful and initial guide, which at the same time serves as a corrective to an over-theorising of Marx on the issue of literature, is to remind ourselves that Marx's ultimate objective was to give 19th-century European capitalist economics a human face and humane praxis (*see* A. Kee 1990) and not necessarily to present a coherent literary theory.

In trying to take account of the ambiguity and sometimes contradictory views of Marx on art and literature, Eagleton formulates his own view arguing that the literary text is not the 'expression' of social class. The text, rather, is a certain production of ideology (Eagleton 1976b:64). Macherey, who disregards the influence of material conditions on literature, confines himself to an analysis of literary discourse giving it an independent (autonomous) status. In this regard he argues that "the text possesses and contains its own kind of truth, and that an extrinsic judgement involves an arbitrary distortion" (197b:51). In defining discourse he writes:

> We have defined literary discourse as parody, as a contestation of language rather than a representation of reality. It distorts rather than imitates (Eagleton 1976b:61).

While Eagleton clearly moves away from any notion of strict determinism in the process of literary production and opts rather for a more dialectical approach, Macherey completely ignores even the role of the material base in the production of literary meaning. The position taken by this study is that literature is not an objective artifact with neutral or no meaning. While literature does enjoy a certain level of autonomy, its production is either influenced by or determined by class interests. The point is that literature does not have an intrinsic value in and of itself. The key to understanding literature is looking at its function in social formations. Thus, while we hold the view that literature is the product of a dialectic between the *economic base* and the *ideological superstructure*, its function is dependent on the class interests appropriating it. Consequently, a text which might well be liberatory for one social formation might have just the opposite effect (i.e. be considered oppressive) for that same type of social formation in another historical era or within the same societal structure and economy. The differing interpretations of the Bible by black liberation theologians and white Apartheid theologians in South Africa is a case in point (*see* Chapter 2 above).

The interpretation of literature: A theory of literature must of necessity address the thorny issue of interpretation. If indeed literature functions somewhat independently (semi-autonomously) of the forces of production, it not only creates different levels of meaning but reflects different forms and structures depending on class interests appropriating such a text. The crucial question which arises, and which is relevant for

our discussion is: *Wherein lies the meaning of a text; its form or its content*? As on other matters of theory, Marxist literary theorists are divided here as well. Some like Althusser (1976), in particular his disciple Macherey (1978), make the point that ideology is more than free floating ideas and has a definite structural coherence. Ideology, described by Macherey (1978:62) in terms of 'illusion', is the material on which the writer goes to work ultimately giving it shape and structure.

Literary theorists like Georg Lukács and Fredric Jameson have addressed, extensively, the issue of form and structure. In his now classic work, *Marxism and Form* (1971), Jameson proceeds to argue that literary form is but the working out of content. Thus access to the meaning of literature is primarily dictated by recognising and analysing its form. In other words, the form of a text reflects the inner logic of its content of which social or literary forms are transformative products. A theorist like Macherey would probably oppose Jameson on the grounds that texts (i.e. the form of the text) do not necessarily constitute a homogenous sense of meaning but rather *de-centered* continuous conflicts and disparities of meanings. It is therefore unreasonable to assume that the form of a text is the working out of its content.

Goldmann (1964), who has been classified as belonging to the neo-Hegelian school of Marxist critics, and stands in the tradition of Lukács, is nevertheless helpful as a way of working towards a resolution of positions like those espoused by, for example, Jameson and Macherey. Goldmann, famous for formulating the term *genetic*

structuralism examines a literary text for the degree to which it embodies the structure and thought (what Goldmann calls *world vision*) of the social class or group to which the writer belongs. He holds that literary works are not the creation of individual but what he calls *trans-individual* mental structures of a social group - a kind of sociology of literature. In other words, a text reflects the aspirations, structure of ideas and values that a particular group shares, a kind of genetic cohesion (structuralism). Therefore the form/structure of a literary work reflects the mental structures (a kind of genetic unity) of a group, mental structures which are historically produced. Goldmann wants to show that the structure of a literary work reflects the world vision of a particular socio-historical group/class.

The fundamental weakness of Goldmann's otherwise useful theoretical construct, is not so much his neo-Hegelian hangover, but rather his constrictive understanding of social consciousness. He sees social consciousness as a direct expression of a social class, just as a literary work is the direct expression of this consciousness. The assumption here is that social consciousness/social mentality is homogenous (*contra* Macherey).

What is the way forward, given these two examples of rather divergent assumptions of the nature and interpretation of literature; on the one hand a view of texts as a unified 'genetic structure' (Goldmann) and on the other hand a view of texts as having multiple (de-centred) centres (Macherey)?

It would not be inaccurate to describe Goldmann and Macherey as talking past one another. And yet there is a sense in which, in a limited and qualified way, they are describing two elements of the same reality, elements which are not necessarily in conflict with each other - the proverbial two-sides of the same coin. We agree with Macherey that texts display conflicts and contradictions in meanings reflected by its content. At the same time, it is not unreasonable to see those same texts presented as if there were an overarching unity, this reflected in the form in which it presents its content. Is there a methodological conflict here? Are we not perhaps witnessing two emphases which can, in essence, be harmonised? One way to approach the apparent differences between these two literary approaches discussed is to see them as interpretive attempts at different levels. Here Jameson's (1981:75-100) approach *vis-a-vis* the *three levels of Marxist interpretation* of texts is a helpful heuristic tool. The issue of homogenous form (Goldmann) and decentered content (Macherey) are simply two interpretive attempts at different levels and are not in conflict. What these differing views illustrate is that literature functions on more than one level. One perspective does not necessarily invalidate the other. In fact, it is possible to see how these previously thought of antagonistic interpretive schema can, in unison, provide invaluable insights about the same text.

A definition of literature: What relevance does the above discussion on the production of literature, its form and content have in terms of developing a literary-ideological paradigm? In short, there are two points of strategic importance that

emerge as crucial for our purposes here. The first is that we have been able to develop for this study a working definition of literature; i.e. literature as the product of a dialectical relationship between the material conditions of possibility and the ideological superstructure of society, with primacy given to impact of material conditions on all types of discourse.

A second point which is of equal importance, emerges from our discussion, above, concerning form and content. This study holds the view that there need be no theoretical incongruity between an interpretation of a text using the interpretive mechanisms of form and content simultaneously and dialectically. This is particularly relevant for ancient (biblical) texts which have a long and complicated history. Ancient texts such as the Bible reflect redactional activity and processes unlike contemporary novels which are the artifacts of Marxist literary critics. Biblical literature, by virtue of its character, *viz.* its age and complicated redactional history, requires that the exegete engage in what I call *dialectical exegesis*, with form enjoying a primary position in the interpretive process. Giving primacy to form does not imply putting the de-centered content into the straightjacket of form. Neither does it mean that the silences of the text (re: Macherey) will not be heard. In fact, the juxtaposing of form and content gives even more eloquence to the silence of the text since the form, by definition, tries to homogenise its content. The E-N literature illustrates this point very well.

We argue here that the primary form/structure of the E-N text is signified by the imperial decrees which are strategically placed by the compilers of the text, and functions to support as well as justify the privileged status of the Golah. In other words, the formal structure of the text suggests its *pro-Persian* and *pro-Golah* stance (*See Chapter 4 below, where this is demonstrated in detail*). Does this mean that the voices of opposition in the text are, in fact, silenced by the formal structure of the text? Certainly not! The voices of resistance are prominent in E-N. More accurately, these voices of opposition are heard through the hermeneutical prisms of the pro-Golah compilers of E-N. The voices could well have been silenced by the compilers of E-N. Instead, the voices of opposition have been included as a fundamental component of the narrative content. What then, if any, is the role of the loud and audible voices of opposition? The answer lies in the production of ruling class ideology. The silences of the text, or put differently, the hidden agenda of the E-N text is the fact that the ruling class control not only the volume button of the voices of opposition, but also control the on-off button. The compilers of E-N exercise their editorial power by deciding when, how and the extent to which they will use the voices of opposition to reinforce the legitimacy of the reconstruction programme of the pro-Persian Golah community. The voices of the opposition in E-N are therefore coopted by the ruling class, not for the purposes of giving credibility to the grievances of the opposition (i.e. people of the land), but rather to provide a context in which to emphasise the legitimacy of the dominant ruling class voices signified by the formal structure of the text. The threatening methodological contradiction between form and

content in the interpretation of literature is thus resolved by recognising not only different levels of interpretation of the same text but by giving primacy to the form of a text as a signifier of its ideological content.

In sum, the theory of literature undergirding a literary-ideological mode of reading is composite, if not radically eclectic, defining literature as the product of a dialectical relationship between the material base and its superstructure giving primacy to the forces of production (i.e. the material base). Furthermore, literature must be interpreted in terms of a dialectical relationship between form and content, giving primacy to form. If this is the manner in which we define literature, how then are we to understand the function of literature? It is at this point that a crucial factor in any discussion concerning literature and its **function** now emerges, namely the concept of ideology.

In the following section we will develop and thereby give content to our definition of ideology, with a particular emphasis on how it imprints itself (or is imprinted by others) on texts, especially texts which, in *content*, reflects conflict, and in *form*, reflects a homogenous social mentality.

3.4.4 Towards a concept of Ideology

It would not be overstating the case to liken a discussion on ideology to walking through a minefield, blindfolded. Using a different metaphor, the editors of a volume

on contending ideologies in South Africa describe the difficulty facing anyone wishing to discuss the definition of the concept of ideology. They write:

> Ideology, in a crowded desert of contemporary political and social disputes, seems to be an animal with a hundred names, none of which captures adequately the elusive reality signified by the term (Leatt et al 1986:273).

Terry Eagleton's (1991) recent book seeks to address precisely the ideological dilemma. After outlining the history of the concept of ideology, having in mind to disentangle some of the conceptual confusions attendant upon it, he writes in his conclusion:

> The term ideology has a wide range of historical meanings, all the way from the unworkable broad sense of the social determination of thought to the suspiciously narrow idea of the deployment of false ideas in the direct interests of a ruling class. Very often, it refers to the ways in which signs, meanings and values help reproduce a dominant social power; but it can also denote any significant conjecture between discourse and political interests. From a radical standpoint, the former meaning is pejorative, while the latter is more neutral (Eagleton 1991:221).

In order to steer a course through the many facets of this debate so as to develop a concept of ideology for a literary-ideological paradigm, two components will serve as reference points (controlling factors), namely issues of *meaning* and *power*. These components are significant for the analysis of biblical texts in general (see Coote & Coote 1990)), especially those texts which reflects a deliberate collaboration of political and religio-cultural discursive practices, the imperial decrees in E-N being the perfect example. The presence and strategic literary location of imperial decrees within the text of E-N raises critical questions which revolve around why such a collaboration of texts was necessary and what the implications of such a specific and

strategic combination of texts within the context of early Second Temple Palestine would be.

As indicated above, ideology for Marx expresses the relationship between inverted forms of consciousness and men's material existence. For Marx, ideology had a negative function and refers to the distortion of thought aimed at concealing social contradictions, hence the notion of false consciousness.

If there was an event which could possibly have challenged the foundational tenets of Marx's thought, then it must have been the events surrounding the *coup d'état* in France with the subsequent rise to power of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte in France (1851). It was not so much the *coup d'état* but the peasant support (ideological) which facilitated the rise to power of Louis Bonaparte. If social classes are supposed to act in their interests what is it that caused the peasants to act outside of their obvious economic interests and put in power someone like Napoleon? What is it that caused the peasants to interpret Louis Bonaparte as both the master and representative of the peasantry? Was this just a revolutionary fiasco, a temporary set back to the social revolution of the future? Why did the events of 1848-51 give rise to reactionary as opposed to the expected revolutionary spirit? Although Marx seems to shrug off the *coup d'état* as a fiasco, a *once-off* set back to the real revolution, Thompson rightly pursues the illogic of Marx's responses in his *The Eighteenth Brumaire*. He argues that the real reason why the peasants supported Napoleon, who Marx calls a

'vagabond', is really quite simple and straightforward:

> ... they were entranced by a figure who presented himself as a saviour by donning the costumes of their one-time hero. The *coup d'état* can be explained, not by showing that the key classes acted in accordance with their alleged interests ... but rather by claiming that they acted in accordance with a tradition which was re-activated by the words and images of an imposter [i.e. Napoleon] (Thompson 1990:43).

How this is theoretically possible is only alluded to (and not exhaustively explained) by Marx in terms of the function of symbolic forms, such as tradition. In a time of crisis people draw back into the past which is more familiar and therefore secure, thereby failing to perceive their collective interests, thereby inhibiting them from engaging in acts which will transform the present oppressive social order. The significance of this event for Marx, and indeed the concept of ideology, is hard to imagine. But, as Thompson points out, "If Marx underestimated the significance of the symbolic dimension of social life, he nevertheless glimpsed its consequences in the context of mid-nineteenth-century France" (1990:44).

Thompson rightly notes that Marx's response to the events of 1848-51 as outlined in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, creates the theoretical space to develop a concept of ideology which takes into account in a fundamental way the role of *symbolic formations*. It is unfortunate that Marx did not theorise extensively about the way in which symbols function in the transformation of specific contexts. Did Marx not see the theoretical space created by this anomalous situation or did he refuse to acknowledge the power of symbols in the process of societal transformation (a

recognition which no doubt would have required an extensive revision of his theories of consciousness and ideology)? This lacuna in Marx' theorising notwithstanding, his scattered views on ideology is of inestimable value for its element of critique i.e. its negative element. The enduring contribution of Marx, here, is his conclusion that ideology and power are inseparable in the maintenance of power relations in society. Ideology is much more than a system of thought and belief, viz., a neutral definition of ideology. Ideology, we learn from Marx relates specifically to how the domination of one group is maintained and legitimated. Thus a fundamental weakness (oversight!) in Marx's concept of ideology is his confining of it to the domain of economic relations and totally ignoring the potential of symbolic forms (e.g. linguistic utterances, texts) as it relates to relations of power and meaning - relations of domination (Thompson 1990:7).

If symbolic forms, as is claimed here, have the power to affect social change (or prevent change from happening), a crucial question relates to how symbolic meaning is constructed. Symbolic forms can include visual (e.g. texts, art) or non-visual images, non-textual words (i.e.oral tradition) , and a range of actions. These symbolic forms are embedded in social contexts which are "produced by subjects and recognised by them and others as meaningful constructs" (Thompson 1990:59). In other words, symbolic forms are shared perceptions of social reality to the extent that these perceptions provide a point of reference whereby to measure societal values within a given social formation. A range of factors (like education, family genealogy,

social class, wealth) creates a situation where not all members of a particular social formation will have equal access to power in order to make decisions about the content and meaning of symbolic forms which will invariably change from epoch to epoch. It is at this point that we can begin to talk about domination - a situation Thompson describes as "systemmatically asymmetrical" (1990:59). Until we reach Marx's classless society, or until all members of a given society have equal access to all symbolic forms in terms of determining its content and meaning, relations of domination will remain a characteristic feature of social relations. The study of the ways in which meaning is constructed within the context of the relations of domination within a given social formation is what defines a study of ideology. We thus agree with Thompson that:

> **... to study ideology is to study the ways in which meaning serves to establish and sustain relations of domination** (1990:56).

A significant implication of this definition of ideology is that there is no interest (or need) in establishing the truth or falsity of symbolic forms but rather the ways in which these forms under certain circumstances establish relations of domination. In terms of our study of the decrees in E-N this means that a debate concerning the truth or falsity of the decrees, for example, is irrelevant. Instead, the role and function of the decrees should be the primary point of exegetical investigation. An important question emerges at this point namely, How are relations of domination maintained (created!). By way of response let us focus on two elements of a possible answer; *domination through legitimation,* on the one hand, and *unification* on the other hand (see

Thompson 1990:57-67). Domination through legitimation means that certain claims to legitimacy are based on certain grounds, expressed in certain symbolic forms. One example of these grounds of legitimacy is the realm of historiography. There are 'official' *his*-stories which are chronicled to justify the exercise of power by those who possess it. There are also *her*-stories which tell essentially the same story but from the perspective of those who are excluded from power. Both stories appeal to shared symbolic forms, but are located in different quarters of the structured social relations of that society. The success, sustainability and legitimacy of the history preserved depends on the extent to which a particular group has access to the machinery of power wherewith to enforce a particular conception of history - in this case such machinery would include newspapers, printing houses, films and so on.

Domination through unification is another aspect of domination which directly impacts E-N. By unification is meant the constructing, at the symbolic level, a form of unity which embraces individuals in a collective way (a collective identity which could be either pejorative and conciliatory in character). In this regard, "Symbolic forms are adapted to a standard framework which is promoted as the shared and acceptable basis of symbolic exchange" (Thompson 1990:64). Here the construction of symbols of national (cultural) unity and collective identity become extremely important. The construction of such symbols (e.g. national flag, anthem, collective history, etc) are not without its problems and/or opposition. The E-N text illustrates this dimension of ideology very well in its emphasis on the Golah community as being

the only *legitimate* champion and *preserver* of authentic Jewishness within the context of early Second Temple Judah-Jerusalem. (*See Chapter 5 & 6 below for an analysis of this type of discourse*).

3.5 Convergence and Contradictions

In discussing a concept of ideology relevant for our study of E-N, we have sought to understand how meaning, mobilised by symbolic forms, create and sustain relations of power and domination. Thompson (1990:7-10) identifies at least four advantages in reformulating a concept of ideology in terms of meaning a power. *First,* it moves us beyond viewing ideology as mere social cement - a neutral definition of ideology which homogenises the contradictions and conflict inherent is social formation. *Second*, it recognises that symbolic formation and structure systems are not ideological in themselves, but become ideological to the extent they are used to maintain relations of domination. This is illustrated by the imperial decrees in E-N. The Persian regime, unlike the Babylonians before them, repatriated their Jewish subjects - a primary impetus of the decrees. The imperial decrees themselves, if considered outside the context of the pro-Golah text of E-N, and within the context of comparative politics in the ANE, Persian imperial policy is viewed favourably (liberatory!) by Jews in the Diaspora - Jews desiring to return to their ancestral homeland. This is certainly the sense one gets from the Cyrus decree (Ez 1:2-4). However, when these same decrees are placed within the context of the E-N narrative, they become cloaked with ideological significance for a different audience. Their

function in the context of the E-N literature has nothing to do with a comparison of Babylonian versus Persian policy *vis-a-vis* their colonial subjects. Instead, the decrees are used by the compilers of the E-N text to establish (reaffirm along the lines of tradition) the positions of power and privilege formerly enjoyed by the former Judahite ruling elite, now repatriated from Babylon.

It is at this point that the decrees are acquire ideological meaning and significance ascribed to them by the compilers of E-N. A decree like that of King Cyrus (Ez 1:2-4) functions differently when part of the religio-cultural heritage of the Jews, than it did independently of the E-N text. While this is conjectural the theoretical point remains valid namely, it another context the decrees might well have had a different meaning and function. However, in the hands of the E-N compilers, the decrees function way beyond that of being historical referents in the text. A *hermeneutic of suspicion,* of course, questions any notion that the Persian policy was one premised on benevolence with little to do with the hunger pangs of imperial domination. As will be pointed out in Chapter 7 below, Persian imperialism certainly was more palatable and acceptable to its subjects in Palestine when compared with the destabilisation policies of Assyria and Babylon. But Persia's liberal policy of repatriation must not be confused with benevolence. There were very definite political and economic constraints which explain why Persia's colonial policy necessitated unequivocal support for a Golah-controlled Palestine, one of the most strategically placed of all the provinces which comprised the Persian empire.

A third advantage of defining ideology as meaning and ideas which maintains power, is that it avoids locating relations of power, exclusively, in the domain of institutionalised power. In other words, ideology not only functions on a macro-social political level but also on a micro-social level - the level at which the ordinary person interacts with structured social relations (e.g. gender relations, religious festivals, local government, etc). At this level of social interaction the inequalities of power and resources within a structured social environment give rise to what might well be labelled, *ideological behaviour* - behaviour which sustains inequality. Again, an illustration from the E-N text helps to clarify how this world in reality, namely the marriage débâcle (Ez 9-10). Ezra, with all the power of Persia behind him, sanctions the sending away (divorce) of foreign women who had become integrated into mainstream Jewish life. In fact, some of them were married to priests and leading officials within the social structure of that society. With the arrival of Ezra, these once legal marriages had to be dissolved. In the process the process of cultural redefinition through separatist politics the female gender became the radically silenced (not necessarily passive) recipients of the scorn of the Persian sponsored Golah community.

A literary-ideological observation notes that the issue of intermarriage between Jewish males and non-Jewish females (foreign/strange women) was an explosive ideological issue as it perpetuates unequal relations of power. The voices of the women, the ones who are most directly affected, are silenced and the situation was such that the

husbands were the ones to determine the destiny of the once-before wives. We would not be too far wrong to lay the ultimate blame for the breakup of marriages at the door of the Persian court. The Persian regime, indirectly, through Ezra, has to take ultimate responsibility for maintaining relations of power in Palestine favouring one group (Golah) over against another (people of the land). We see then, that a definition of ideology as accepted here, helps us to see very clearly how power relations are maintained on a micro-social level with the macro-social dynamics not too far in the background.

Finally, ideology defined as meaning in the service of power moves us beyond Marx's idea of ideology as pure illusion. For Marx, ideology as a realm of images and ideas reflect inadequately a social reality that exists prior to and independently of these images and ideas. Yet, as Thompson (1990:9) points out:

> ... the social world is rarely as simple as this view would suggest. As individuals we are immersed in sets of social relations and we are immersed in sets of social relations and we are constantly involved in commenting upon them, in representing them to ourselves and others, in enacting, recreating and transforming them through actions, symbols and words. The symbolic forms, through which we express ourselves and understand others do not constitute some ethereal other world which stands opposed to what is real: rather, they are partially constitutive of what, in our societies, 'is real'. By refocusing the study of ideology on the terrain of situated symbolic forms, on the ways in which symbolic forms are used to establish and sustain relations of power, we are studying an aspect of social life which is as real as any other. For social life is, to some extent, a field of contestation in which struggle takes place through words and symbols as well as through the use of physical force (Thompson 1990:9-10).

Ideology as understood by this study concerns the intersection of meaning and power

and how these serves the interests of the dominant ideas of a society, which invariably are the ruling ideas. A definition of ideology as ideas in the service of power relations also helps to recognise that ideological struggle and warfare signify very real struggles.

3.6 CONCLUSION

The above analysis has gone a long way to show that the articulation of a literary-ideological mode of reading for biblical literature is thoroughly dependant upon previous attempts at theorising about the meaning of texts and the locus of such meaning. Certainly, no one paradigm is able to resolve all the methodological tensions which emerge. In an attempt to clarify this methodological approach, we have attempted to bring into critical dialogue the character and quality of the E-N literature on the one hand, with Marxist literary and social theory. The Marxist method and approach was chosen as an exegetical sounding board since it, more than any other method, takes most seriously issues of power, politics and ideology in the production of meaning. We have pointed out some obvious limitations in the Marxist method, thereby avoiding an uncritical appropriation of Marxist theory and method for biblical exegesis.

The nature of the E-N literature combined with an interest in issues of power and ideology in biblical texts, has necessitated the construction of a reading strategy which will best do justice to the subjective interests of the exegete as well as the

'objective' constraints of the text. To this end we have developed a literary-ideological paradigm for interpreting E-N - a paradigm which holds in creative tension two fundamental elements of any text, namely its literary character and ideological agenda. The extent to which such a reading strategy is useful will depend on the extent to which the results of the following exegetical chapters move E-N studies beyond its present methodological and interpretive impasse. To this end we will apply the methodological parameters of a literary-ideological paradigm.

CHAPTER 4

IMPERIAL DECREES AS THE STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS OF EZRA-NEHEMIAH

This chapter aims to answer the question: *What is the organising principle of the E-N literature?* The position taken in this study, and argued in greater detail below, is that the imperial decrees of Persia provide the E-N literature its primary literary and structural coherence. The coherence of each of the literary blocs that make up the E-N corpus is not necessarily found in the realm of linguistic or stylistic or even historical parallels, but in the construction of the E-N narrative around the imperial decrees, with the ideology which these decrees reflect. An analysis of the literary structure of the text using the imperial decrees as a hermeneutical lens makes explicit, more than any other exegetical and analytical method, the ideological character of the E-N literature.

The nature of the E-N text as a text of reconstruction within the Second Temple period is discussed, followed by a surveying of the content of the three literary units that make up the E-N literary corpus. Next, a demonstration of the centrality of the imperial decrees within each of the three identified literary units leads to a comparison and contrast of the structural units in terms of their focus, design and ideological commitments. A summary of the observations concludes the chapter.

4.1 EZRA-NEHEMIAH AS A TEXT OF NATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION

One of the functions served by the E-N literature is to trace carefully the process of national reconstruction of the newly emerging polity of Israel during the Second Temple (post-exilic) period. While the immediate focus of the E-N text itself is Jerusalem-Judah, E-N, ideologically speaking, reflects a much broader programme. The geopolitical-ideological agenda of the E-N text, which can be seen particularly when one examines the Israel ideology with a study of land in E-N, reflects aspirations for the development and conceptualisation of an Israel whose borders would coincide with pre-monarchic geopolitical boundaries (*see* Stern 1984).

E-N, as the principal biblical record of the Jews for its historical period, describes the process of national reconstruction in three easily identifiable literary units (Williamson 1987a:14; Daniels 1991:311-38). While scholars do not agree on the exact content of each of the units, and, given that there is some overlap of content between units, duplication of information, problematic historical references and a host of other literary-oriented problems, three major structural units can be identified:

1. *Sheshbazzar-Zerubbabel material [S-Z] = Ezra 1-6*
2. *Ezra material [E] = Ezra 7-10 (and possibly Neh 8:1-9:5)*
3. *Nehemiah material [N] = Nehemiah 1-13 (possibly excluding Nehemiah 8 & 9, traditionally considered to be displaced [E] material.)*

Identification of the literary units suggests that the exegete can demarcate the process

of national reconstruction in terms of three phases, here considered to be ideologically and not historically motivated. Each of the units has an imperial decree as its central source of power, vision and terms of reference. In addition, each unit centers around powerful Jewish leaders whom the Persian colonial regime recognised to be trustworthy and legitimate in terms of supervising the process of restoration and reconstruction in Jerusalem-Judah.

The E-N text obviously only reflects Second Temple reconstruction events considered important to the compilers, the events selected to inform the national memory and psyche for the period. As a selection, the E-N text is, of necessity, the final product and compilation of many sources, characters, ideas and events combined to present an image of life during the restoration era (cf.Eskenazi 1988:37). If we accept that a major proportion of the E-N narrative is dependent upon source material stitched together to form a narrative whole, a significant implication emerges: the selection of data for the narrative presentation could not be blindly arbitrary or even haphazard. A compiled text like E-N presupposes a careful selection from a host of reconstruction images and a sifting of the relevant details, which serves the interests and spiritual-ideological agenda(s) of the compiler(s). The challenge is to try to make explicit the content of the spiritual-ideological agenda. Williamson writes:

> It is apparent that this wide variety of material is due to the use of different sources by whoever compiled these books into their present shape. If we can isolate what these sources were, we shall be in a stronger position to trace not only how they have been stitched together but why this has been done in the way that it has (Williamson 1987:15).

Thus, according to Williamson (1987:15ff), it is first necessary to identify the source(s) which inform the compilation. He goes on to claim on the basis of source-critical analytical observations, that the exegete is in a position to postulate an innovative and plausible theory of compilation. Williamson's source-critical observations enable him to conclude that the Nehemiah material was incorporated at the earliest and not the latest phase of compilation. A key factor of Williamson's analysis is in recognising the dependence of Ezra 2/3 on Nehemiah 7/8 and not *vice versa,* indicating, argues Williamson, that the Ezra and Nehemiah Memoirs were joined before the books reached their present form (Williamson 1987:42). While Williamson considers this to be a common-sense conclusion, he does note that scholarship has simply been blind in this regard. In trying to explain such scholarly myopia he says:

> The reason why this logical conclusion has been ignored is the prevailing assumption that the Chronicler was responsible for much of the editorial work in these books, and especially in Ezra 1-6. ... If we allow the evidence to free us from this presupposition, however, then we may allow the evidence to lead where it will (Williamson 1987:42).

Williamson's theory of compilation assumes, first, that the E-N material is a separate work from the work of the Chronicler, and second, that in terms of outlining the compositional history of the E-N text there are two major phases. In the first phase, the Ezra and Nehemiah Memoirs (i.e. approx. Ez 7-10 and Neh 1-7; 8; 12:31-43; 13:4-31) are joined. The second uses Ezra 1-6 as a preface to the combination of the

memoirs.

The intention of this chapter is to try to understand the organising principle undergirding the E-N compilation, an intention intensified by a desire to try to understand why the preserved images of reconstruction are structured in the present form. Williamson, himself, asks the same question, as can be seen from the above quotation (cf.1987:15). Williamson's answer to the *why* question, however, is framed strictly in terms of the compiler's theological outlook. For example, concerning the motivating intentions of the editor who spliced together the Ezra and Nehemiah memoirs (i.e., the first phase of compilation), Williamson writes that the editor:

> ...intended this to be read as a covenant renewal. His motivation for splicing together the Ezra and the Nehemiah sources then becomes transparent: after telling of the major reforms of each, he has pulled these chapters together to form a united climax to their work. The proclamation of God's law is granted only to the purified community, while their response in confession and commitment represents the culmination of all that the reformers had been striving towards (Williamson 1987:43).

Williamson's analysis does not problematise the covenant renewal programme in terms of the sociopolitical mechanisms which not only facilitated the renewal programme but also possibly provided the ideological framework for its theological expression. In other words, the way in which the theology was expressed may have a direct bearing on the nature of its ideological support. This study attempts to show that we can deduce from the literary structure more than just the theological intention of the compiler(s).

While the composite character of the narrative is acknowledged, there is no consensus concerning the nature, extent, origin and authenticity of the sources upon which the compilers depended for their information. We do not know why the compiler(s) selected the information chosen. We also do not know for certain when and at what stage which portions of the material were stitched together, although redaction-critical analysis has helped us to make intelligent guesses. Redaction critics also help us to recognise that there are definite redactional seams which hold the E-N narrative together. While we accept that the three structural units of E-N literature can be intelligently divided into smaller units which may have minor motifs of their own, the intention of the analysis of the present study is to try to understand how and why the E-N narrative as a whole (i.e., in its present canonical form) functions.

If we were to accept that there are three major identifiable structural units which comprise the E-N text, and if we were to accept that the E-N text is to be read as a separate compilation from that of Chronicles, what could we learn from an analysis of the structural components of this text? Of course, the answer always depends on what the exegete is trying to discover from the text. The explicit intention of this chapter, indeed this dissertation, is to try to uncover the spiritual-ideological agenda(s) of the E-N text. There have been essentially two approaches applied to analyse the literary structure of the E-N text from the spiritual-ideological standpoint. One approach identifies the literary devices used by the compiler(s) and redactor(s) of the text. Since the text is considered to be chronologically and historically problematic, the

observation of literary devices in the text is used to reconstruct the text to make it chronologically more accurate and thematically more coherent (*see e.g.* Talmon 1962).

In the other approach to interpreting and analysing the literary structure of E-N, that essentially adopted by Eskenazi (1988) in her literary analysis of the E-N text, the canonical text is accepted as presently arranged. Eskenazi does not find it necessary, unlike Talmon (1962), to rearrange the text to appreciate its literary structure and thematic orientation. She engages in a structuralist reading of E-N using the literary model of Claude Bermond (Eskenazi 1988:38f). Eskenazi essentially argues that E-N, as it stands presently, reflects a literary symmetry and coherence and therefore needs no textual rearranging.

Eskenazi's analytical framework enables her to describe E-N as premised on three major themes: the centrality of the people, the expansion of the house of God to encompass the city and the primacy of the written word as a vehicle of authority. She argues that the focus of E-N is on the triumph of the *people* in terms of their obedience to the reforms, not on the heroism of their leaders. She also posits a very strong move towards establishing the primacy of the written text as a vehicle of authority.

While Eskenazi's emphasis on the literary unity of the E-N is refreshing, it leaves

unanswered vital questions about power and ideology. Eskenazi does discuss ideology in the text, but such discussion she confines to the summary she makes of scholarly works which are specifically concerned with ideology. Her primary concern is with works which attempt to identify the ideological similarities between E-N and Chronicles (1988:21f). She notes that scholars have not really made a clear distinction between *theological* and *ideological* concerns and have assumed the content of the two categories to be identical (Eskenazi 1998:21 fn51). Eskenazi falls prey to her own critique, as she, herself, does not make a clear distinction between ideology and theology. The extent of her attempt to clarify her ideological position and definition is confined to a short remark in a footnote:

> I use the term "ideology" for both types of concerns, defining it in accordance with Rimmon-Kenan (who relies on Uspensky). Speaking of the ideological facet, she writes: "This facet, often referred to as 'the norms of the text', consists of 'a general system of viewing the world conceptually', in accordance with which the events and characters of the story are evaluated" (Eskenazi 1988:21 fn51).

Eskenazi, like Braun, Throntveit and Japhet, does identify various themes which she considers to be ideological. However, the purpose and context of the discussion of ideology is restricted to an attempt at establishing or disproving similarities between E-N and Chronicles with the intention of arguing for or against common authorship. The major ideological characteristics which have been identified and attributed to the Chronicler include an emphasis on David and his dynasty, an emphasis on the cult, genealogies, retribution, the concept of Israel and the anti-Samaritan polemic (Eskenazi 1988:22f). In her summary of ideological characteristics, Eskenazi points

out that:

> ...most of the alleged hallmarks of the Chronicler do not occur in both Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles. Only one of these, namely the cult, constitutes a possible common emphasis, although even here differences emerge. All other characteristics constitute, in fact, ideological contrasts between the books (Eskenazi 1988:33).

One major contrast between Chronicles and E-N, according to Ezkenasi, is in the understanding of nationhood. Chronicles reflects an inclusivist paradigm in which the:

> ...concept of Israel embraces all twelve tribes and is open to others who choose to join the true worship in Jerusalem, under the authority of Davidic rulers. Another person or circle, with a different ideology, is responsible for Ezra-Nehemiah. This "author" is not interested in David. "His" concept of Israel is exclusive, limited to Judah, Benjamin, priests and Levites. "He"...opposes mingling with foreigners, and does not have Chronicles' interest in retribution, nor its emphasis on prophets (Eskenazi 1988:33).

Eskenazi (1988:36) thus accepts that E-N should be studied and interpreted in its own right, in terms of "its own ideology and meanings, without depending on Chronicles for highlight". To this end, she uses Bremond's structural schematisation of story to interpret the E-N literature.

A fundamental clue as to the structure of the E-N narrative, according to Eskenazi (1988:37) is the major repetition of the lists of returnees (Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7). She also points out the importance of the decree of Cyrus and the response to it (Ez 1:1-6), but only in terms of its encapsulating of the major themes. Eskenazi notes still further that a key verse summarising the book of Ezra is Ezra 6:14, which makes explicit the combination of the decrees of God with those of three Persian kings.

Armed with the above formal observations, she then engages in a structuralist schematization of the E-N narrative with the help of Bremond's literary model.

Eskenazi's emphasis on the literary dimensions of the E-N text is a refreshing contrast to the *historicist* bent that for so long has dominated E-N research, particularly because of her emphasis on the narrative wholeness and coherence of E-N. A significant deficiency in her literary analysis, however, is the obvious lack of an appreciation for the role of the imperial decrees in the formation of the text and for their role in the reconstruction of Israel during the period. Eskenazi also fails to recognise the inherent power assumptions of the E-N text, both explicit and implicit. Her relegation to a footnote of a discussion of ideology is unfortunate. Eskenazi (1989:59) correctly observes that E-N is propelled by written documents. She also makes the important point that Ezra 6:14 functions as the linchpin for the whole book. It is in Ez 6:14, she says, that "the edict of God and the edict of the three kings combine to explain the success of the Judeans..." and that the Persian kings are made to speak with one voice (1988:59). She indeed makes the point that "all important events...happen with reference to or empowerment by documents" (Eskenazi 1988:58). The ultimate focus for Eskenazi is to show that the emphasis in Ezra 1-6, particularly, is on the written word. Indeed, all important events in the section happen with reference to or through empowerment by documents.

While Eskenazi considers the imperial decrees to form part of the collection of

authoritative documents, she does not necessarily consider them to play a fundamental or central role in the formation and structure of Ezra 1-6 or even E-N as a whole. She does recognise that the decrees do propel the text. However, she does not give the center stage to the imperial decrees since she considers them to be but one of many stage props in the narrative structure.

It does seem that if the imperial decrees of Persia do not represent the central feature of the E-N text, it becomes very difficult to appreciate the kinds of emphases which Eskenazi develops. For example, she argues that the text shies away from the heroic individual model and moves toward an emphasis on the triumph of the people as opposed to the heroism of individual leaders. While this may be so, the issues of power politics and class struggle remain an important factor to consider. The issue of political power and ideology simply can not be ignored. The triumph of the people which Eskenazi talks about can be restated as the triumph of the *purified* or *non-polluted* people. The crucial question is: what are the power assumptions of those empowered to determine who is to be considered either purified or unclean? The E-N text makes it clear that many people are excluded from being counted as *people* or *members* of the congregation of the purified. Why? How?

The E-N text does refer to those who consistently challenge the exclusivist premise and assumptions on which the returnees from exile developed the identity of the new Israel. Representatives from the forces opposing the exclusivist paradigm of the

returnees also sought and, in some cases, won the favour and decision of the imperial crown. Yet, it is ultimately the returning exiles who secure imperial decrees that guarantee their privileged status in Judah-Jerusalem. The fundamental issue, therefore, is much deeper than merely observing a deemphasis of individual heroism and an emphasis on community triumph. The issue that demands analytical and exegetical attention is the issue of power politics and ideological hegemony. While we can observe a shift of emphasis, i.e. from the heroic leader to the community, we cannot but ask questions concerning the mechanisms which eased the victory of one group over the other. Indeed, the text itself makes explicit the political power battles *vis-a-vis* those who legitimately belong to the Persian sponsored socio-ethnic group returning from exile.

Eskenazi's focus on the evolving primacy of the authority of the written word is of fundamental importance to her study of E-N literature. However, her study begs a question: What mechanisms ease the literary evolution and revolution? She, for example, does not ask questions which relate to the role of the political decrees in terms of legitimising Ezra's contextualisation of certain aspects of the Torah of Moses. In other words, she does not ask how it is possible that the *law*, more accurately, Ezra's school of interpretation of the law, becomes accepted as authoritative for faith and praxis. We know that Ezra's mandate is that of establishing the law of Moses as a religio-cultural basis for a new Judah (Ez 7:10,14b). We can also justifiably suspect that the Persian court assumes the Torah of Moses to function as the Persian

equivalent of civilian law. The appeal to the authority of the law is a recurring theme in the text, and, to some extent, raises suspicion as to its universal validity, but the question remains as to the basis of legitimacy *vis-a-vis* the validity of the Torah and not any other law for a newly emerging quasi-independent Palestine.

There are two issues which immediately emerge. The first pertains to the content and the subsequent exegesis of the law in the Judean society of Ezra. The E-N text provides no real content *vis-a-vis* the law. It therefore does seem that the paradigm of the *law of Moses* functions in providing more of a spiritual-ideological paradigm than of a substantive *legal* basis for the kind of religio-cultural programme spearheaded by Ezra. In other words, we seem to be dealing here with a power statement rather than a substantive document, as such. We, thus, look in vain in E-N for any kind of support for Pentateuchal arguments (cf.Rendtorff 1984; Kellermann 1968). Such a search, or any discussion which tries to equate the *Torah of Moses* with the Pentateuch, misses the point completely. The *Torah of Moses* as an ideological weapon of struggle serves simply to evoke and underscore Ezra's political as well as religious legitimacy within a rather volatile Second Temple context - a context in which other Jews also were claiming to worship the same God as that of the returning exiles.

A second issue was the basis of authority for the *Torah of Moses*. To what extent would and could this law have been binding without the political and ideological support of the Persian regime? In other words, if Ezra had returned to Palestine with

only a copy of the Law but without the political power of the decree of Artaxerxes, would that law have enjoyed the authority which it did? Certainly not. We know from the Ezra 1-6 material that the opposition was extremely powerful as well as politically well placed. In fact, the leaders of the opposition were Persian government appointees, heightening the nature of the conflict even further and raising even more serious questions. For example, Why would the king of Persia, on one level, negate the existing Persian leadership structures in favour of a small elitist group of returning exiles? What kinds of guarantees were given and/or secured by both Persia and the returning community of exiles prior to the exiles returning to the land? We may never know the exact answers to such questions, but this does not mean that we should discontinue making intelligent guesses.

Eskenazi's focus on the triumph of the *community*, while valid, is limited, since her analysis does not take seriously enough the mechanisms which facilitated the triumph of the people. It is doubtful whether the restructuring of the Judean economy, culture and society on the basis of *only* the law which Ezra brings with him from exile could have been successful. We must also remember that some of those who oppose the building efforts of the returning exiles also appeal to the same religious traditions (and law?) as the exiles.

The questions raised above concerning Eskenazi's work indicate the limitations of a literary analysis which does not take into account the influence of the socio-political

dynamics on the literary structure, formation, creativity and style of the text. It does seem that if we are going to appreciate fully the literary structure of the E-N text, we need to pay more attention to questions of politics, power and ideology and to how they impacted the formation, content and function of the E-N text.

A point of entry into appreciating the literary structure and character of E-N is, in fact, through the issue of political-power struggles. The resettlement of the Jews in Palestine does not appear to have been smooth or void of societal conflict. Thus, a useful inroad to the E-N text would be the radical class struggle which seems to have characterised the resettlement programme of the returnees, occuring essentially between two elite ruling class groups as they compete for control over Persian-supervised Palestine in this period of reconstruction i.e., the Second Temple period. Unlike the Chronicler, E-N does not reflect an empty-land ideology. For the compilers of E-N the presence of others in the land is undeniable. However, their status and privilege is deniable. The returnees know full well that they will encounter people in the land and, if for no other reason, this is why the E-N literature reflects an obsession with official documentation guaranteeing the returnees' position of privilege in the Persian dispensation.

It is thus instructive to note that the nature of the conflict which characterises, particularly Ezra 1-6, suggests that the ideological battle that rages in the text is between two elite groups competing for the right to govern and control the resources

of Judah-Jerusalem. Of particular concern, it seems, is the issue of controlling the economic resource, namely the rebuilt or potentially-rebuilt temple. The level at which the battle is pitched in the text bears witness to this. Both groups are easily able to access the Persian court, independently of one another. Both groups have access to military force. In fact, as is indicated in later chapters of this study, in terms of agrarian social stratification, it is only the aristocratic (i.e. retainer) class which has access to the political powers of the day. The life of the peasant classes remains fairly consistent throughout the colonial period, since their task is simply to produce enough food to pay their taxes. E-N clearly reflects a class struggle between two elites as they compete over resources in a newly-defined nation of Israel.

The E-N literature must therefore be interpreted in terms of its providing the theological justification and ideological legitimation for one ruling elite in its programme of reconstruction for the development of the new nation of Israel in post-Babylonian Palestine. What we are saying here is, on one level, not really anything new. However, scholars seem not to have integrated their theological conclusions with the kinds of questions we raise regarding the nexus of power politics and ideology in the biblical text, especially for the Second Temple period of reconstruction. The E-N material is therefore undoubtedly a body of literature which legitimises the socio-political domination of one ruling minority, the returning former Judean elite, over against an existing ruling elite in the province Beyond the River.

The juxtaposition of the terms *people of the land* [עם־הארץ] and the *people of Judah* [עם־יהודה] requires careful attention in terms of the group whose social status and privilege was being negated. Soggin (1984:213) has pointed out that in the context of a North-South divide (before the Assyrian Conquest) the term עם־הארץ appears for the first time in the biblical narrative. In the pre-exilic context it denotes the landed aristocracy, a group descended from the ancient usufructaries of the tribal lands and therefore economically independent: "this group seems to have backed the Davidic dynasty to the hilt, even if it does not seem to have had any independent role within the legal system" (Soggin 1984:213 referring to the work of Schäfer). In later Judiasm, עם־הארץ denotes the ignorant masses, incapable of study and therefore of observing the law. The Dtr. historian describes the group as supporters of the traditional Yahwistic faith of Israel and "therefore contrasts it with the population of Jerusalem, the majority of which was still Canaanite, and with the court there" (Soggin 1984:213-214).

In E-N, עם־הארץ is used to describe, collectively, the forces opposing the reconstruction and development programme of the returning exiles. The term now includes those Jews who were not exiled by either the Assyrian or Babylonian regimes (i.e. a *non*-exiled group), as well as those Jews who were exiled, but not by Babylon (i.e. a *non*-Golah). By implication, the stereotypical formula *people of the land* was meant to separate in an exact and unequivocal manner, *Jew from Jew,* with the hallmark of Jewish authenticity linked to one's ability to demonstrate conclusively, a

genealogical connection initially, and later an ideological continuity with the Golah community. The returning exiles are portrayed and described in E-N using many different synonyms as are the forces of opposition (see pp.87-89 below - **Socio-Ethnic Terminology: Comparative Charts**).

While this study takes the position that the cultural warfare described in E-N is best understood essentially in terms of a spiritual-ideological battle between two elite Jewish groups, we must not forget that there were other communities of Jews which also contributed to the matrix of Israelite identity during this period. Sara Japhet (1983:104-106) has pointed out that the people of Israel, at this historical juncture, were comprised of at least six components. These include:

1. The community of returned exiles (from Babylon) which settled in Judah and Jersualem.

2 A community in the land of Israel - those who were not exiled by the Babylonian colonial empire

3 Inhabitants of Northern Israel who remained settled in Samaria and in Galilee after the Assyrian Conquest.

4 A community of Judean exiles settled in Babylonia and later Persia.

5 A community of Judeans in Egypt.

6 An Israel community in the land of Ammon.

A seventh group, says Japhet (1983:106) might be the 10 tribes exiled by the kings of Assyria and settled on the borders of their empire, although it is not sure whether they survived up to the time of the Second Temple period.

The resources from which to draw in terms of the content of Israelite (Jewish) identity

were fairly extensive. The E-N text certainly reflects the heterogeneous character of the community in Jerusalem-Judah during this period. However, the spiritual-ideological warfare which rages in E-N is sharpened by dividing the various components of Jewish identity into basically two communities: the Golah community made up exclusively of Babylonian-deportees and their purified descendants, and the non-Golah community made up of all those who were unable to prove affiliation to the Babylonian-based Golah community.

The charts which now follow, while not exhaustive, attempt to illustrate the contrasting socio-ethnic terminology which reflects the spiritual-ideological polarities *vis-a-vis* Jewish identity for the Second Temple period, as portrayed in the E-N literature.

SOCIO-ETHNIC TERMINOLOGY: COMPARATIVE CHARTS

REBUILDING THE TEMPLE: EZRA 1-6

ENEMIES			RETURNEES		
			1:4	הנשאר	survivors [*in whatever place*]
			2:1	משבי הגולה	captive exiles [*carried off to Babylon*]
			2:2b (cf.3:1)	עם־ישראל	people of Israel
4:1	צרי יהודה ובנימן	enemies / adversaries of Judah and Benjamin	4:1	בני הגולה	sons of the exile / Golah
4:2	אסר חדן מלך אשור	[*brought by*] King Assarhaddon of Assyria	4:3	המלך כורש מלך־פרס	*[brought by]* King Cyrus of Persia
4:4	עם־הארץ	people of the land	4:4	עם־יהודה	people of Judah
			4:12	יהודיא	the jews [*who came up from Artaxerxes*]
			4:23	ירושלם על־יהודיא	the Jews in Jerusalem
			5:1	על־יהודיא די ביהוד ובירושלם	all Jews in Judah and Jerusalem
			6:16 (cf.1:2; 2:70; Neh 13:23	בני־ישראל בני־גלותא	sons of Israel ... and the sons of the Golah

REDEFINING THE CULTURE
EZRA 7-10

ENEMIES			RETURNEES		
			9:1	העם ישראל והכהנים והלוים	people of Israel, priests, levites
9:2; cf10: 2, 11	(ב)עמי הארצות	peoples of the land	9:2	זרע הקדש	holy seed
			9:4	הגולה	the Golah (returned exiles)
			9:15 (cf 9:8,13)	פליטה	remnant
			10:1 (cf 10:12)	אליו מישראל קהל	great assembly = men, women, and children of Israel
			10:8	מקהל הגולה	congregation / assembly of exiles
4:1	צרי יהודה ובנימן	Enemies / adversaries of Judah and Benjamin	10:9	כל־אנשי־יהודה ובנימן	people of Judah and Benjamin
			10:10	ישראל	Israel
			10:16	בני־הגולה	sons of the Golah
			7:7,13; 9:1 (Compare to 6:16; 1:2; 2:70.	בני־ישראל	sons (people) of Israel

REDEFINING THE CULTURE
EZRA 7-10

ENEMIES			RETURNEES		
			9:1	העם ישראל והכהנים והלוים	people of Israel, priests, levites
9:2; cf10: 2, 11	(ב)עמי הארצות	peoples of the land	9:2	זרע הקדש	holy seed
			9:4	הגולה	the Golah (returned exiles)
			9:15 (cf 9:8,13)	פליטה	remnant
			10:1 (cf 10:12)	אליו מישראל קהל	great assembly = men, women, and children of Israel
			10:8	מקהל הגולה	congregation / assembly of exiles
4:1	צרי יהודה ובנימן	Enemies / adversaries of Judah and Benjamin	10:9	כל־אנשי־יהודה ובנימן	people of Judah and Benjamin
			10:10	ישראל	Israel
			10:16	בני־הגולה	sons of the Golah
			7:7,13; 9:1 (Compare to 6:16; 1:2; 2:70.	בני־ישראל	sons (people) of Israel

REBUILDING THE CITY WALLS AND RESTRUCTURING THE ECONOMY NEHEMIAH 1-13					
ENEMIES			**RETURNEES**		
10:30,31	מעמי־הארצות	peoples of the land	1:6	על־בני ישראל	people of Israel
			2:16 (cf.5:6)	וליהודים ולכהנים ולחרים ולסגנים	the Jews, the priests, nobles and officials
			5:1 (cf.7:5)	העם ונשיהם	the people and their wives
			7:73	וכל־ישראל	all Israel
			8:7	בני־ישראל	sons of Israel
			8:17; 9:1	כל־הקהל השבים מן־השבי	the assembly of those who had returned from captivity
			13:23 cf.1:2; 3:33,34; 4:6; 5:1,8	היהודים	the Jews

Type of social groupings
Nehemiah: Typical [N] categories = nobles, officials, people
Ezra: Typical [E] categories = people of Israel, priests, levites.

Nature of conflict resolution
Ezra: Decrees from Persia
Nehemiah: Decrees from Persia, as well as armed forces

Major conflict groups

Ez 1-6	key verse=[4:4]	people of the land *against* people of Judah
Ez 7-10	key verse=[9:1,2]	peoples of the land *against* the holy seed (Golah, remnant, congregation of exiles)
Neh 1-13	key verse=[1:6; 10:30,31]	peoples of the land *against* people of Israel

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In Ezra 1-6 conflict between competing factions is described as being between עם־הארץ and עם־יהודה. The עם־הארץ, here, are identified as the Samaritan-based

ruling class represented by Persian government officials such as Tabeel and company (Ez 4:7), Rehum and company (Ez 4:8f) and governor Tattenai and his company (Ez 5:3f). The עם־יהודה is synonymously described elsewhere in Ezra 1-6 with terms such as בני־הגולה; עם־ישראל; יהודיא; לירושלם על־יהודיא.

In Ezra 7-10, the primary focus of the literature is the redefinition of Israel's cultic identity. The language and terminology is based on an exclusivist cultic-ideological premise. The enemy is essentially foreign, impure and unclean non-Israelite women married to Jewish priests as well as other Jewish men. Thus, in Ezra 7-10, the primary distinction is made between those who are considered to be impure, namely, the *peoples of the land* [עמי הארץ], and those considered to be impeccably pure, the *holy seed* זרע הקדש. The imagery used to describe the foreign women is graphic and indicates the intensity and high level of disgust which Ezra felt toward such people (*see especially* Ez 9:11f).

Ezra 7-10 further develops the geopolitical orientation of the language of Ezra 1-6. The returnees now are no longer merely the Golah [הגולה] (Ez 2:1), but the congregation of Babylonian exiles more accurately described as מקהל הגולה [congregation of the Golah].

The [N] literary unit (i.e. Neh 1-13) also describes the enemy as the people of the land [עם־הארץ], juxtaposed to the people of Israel [על־בני ישראל (Neh 1:6)]. The use

of Israel [ישראל] in Nehemiah is distinctly different from the more specific use of Jerusalem in Judah [בירושלם אשר ביהודה] in Ezra 1-6. The use of Israel does seem to reflect a broader geopolitical conceptualisation of the sphere of influence envisaged by the returnees, even though this terminology is not unique to Nehemiah (*see* Ez 2:2; 3:1; 6:16).

The socio-ethnic language of the [N] unit needs to be located on two levels, signified by two levels of social conflict. The primary mission of Nehemiah seems to have been the rebuilding and fortification of the city walls. The threat to the project is an external threat personified in Sanballat, Geshem the Arab and Tobiah (Neh 2:10,19; 4:1,7; 6:1,14). In the midst of the narrative describing the ideological battle between Nehemiah and Sanballat and company is inserted another level of social conflict. In contrast to the conflict with Sanballat, the conflict as described in Nehemiah 5 is an inter-Jewish conflict. Nehemiah is dragged into this bitter internal social conflict between what was an economically powerful Jewish upper class and an impoverished underclass of Jews. The complaint lodged with Nehemiah is that the Jewish upper class has exploited and continues to exploit their Jewish brothers and sisters. The economic exploitation is so severe that the underclass has been forced to sell itself and its children into slavery. So, out of the need to survive, exacerbated by a famine, underclass Jews are being forced to sell their own kindred to foreign nations (and probably to their upper class Jewish brothers and sisters as well). This was the only way to survive, economically. The premise of the fundamental objection of the

underclass to their exploitation by the upper class is that: "...our children are the same as your children" (Neh 5:5).

Here, the enemies are the upper class Jews identified as nobles and officials (Neh 5:7). The lower class Jews are simply described as the people [עם] and their wives [ונשיהם]. The dynamics undergirding the economic-ethnic based conflict facing Nehemiah is succinctly summarised and contrasted as follows:

(Neh 5:1) ותהי צעקת העם ונשיהם גדולה אל־אחיהם היהודים׃

*[Translation: And there was a great cry [i.e. **cry of distress**] of the people and of their wives against their brothers, the Jews [i.e. their fellow Jewish kin].*

There is a particularly interesting parallel between the way in which the Ezra and Nehemiah narratives categorise the people of the Second Temple era. The Golah are subdivided into stylised categories: the people of Israel, priests, levites and temple servants (Ez 2:2b,36,40,43). The initial repatriation included descendants of the servants of Solomon and a number of expatriates who could not prove their genealogical heritage. Thus, in essence, there is a clear tri-partite division of social class which forms the basis of the demographic classification in Jerusalem-Judah (Ez 2:70):

1 *Priests, levites and some of the people residing in Jerusalem.*

2 *Singers, gatekeepers and temple servants in their own towns.*

3 *All Israel in their own towns.*

The Nehemiah corpus (excluding Neh 7:5 - Neh 8) stylises the social demographic

structure of Judah in terms of four groups: Jews, priests, nobles and officials (cf.Neh 2:16). Nehemiah's castigation of the internal conflict clearly reflects a radical distinction between Jews and priests, on one hand, and nobles and officials on the other hand. It is clearly the nobles and officials who bear the guilt for oppressing their ***own*** kindred, meaning that the term *Jew* is a reference to the lower class Jewish citizens of Jerusalem-Judah.

From the above discussion of the classification of socio-ethnic terminology, it is clear that factional politics in E-N are class-based as well as ethnic-based. When the returnees are confronted by opposition from *outside* forces, i.e. Persian government officials (who might or might not be Jews), the opposition is collectively called *people of the land.* The internal clash between the upper and lower class Jews is, of course, clearly an economic-based social class conflict. The E-N literature classifies the ideological and class conflict, here, in terms of a struggle between two competing religio-cultural and socio-economic centres as to where, ultimately, the ideological nerve centre of the new Israel is to be located - Jerusalem or Samaria!

In sum, it appears that the terminology which signifies the social class conflict inherent in the text defines the parameters of the ideological agenda within each of the proposed literary units which constitutes E-N. From the above analysis it seems that the social conflict in Ezra 1-6 is expressed in geopolitical terms - the *people of Judah* as opposed to the *people of the land.* Put differently, the conflict is between the people

who have come from Babylonian exile versus the people who are not classified as such.

Ezra 7-10, however, describes its social class conflict in terms of a cultic-ideological redefinition of what it means to be a Jew. The paradigms juxtaposed here are that of the *holy seed* as opposed to *foreign women.* The foreign women whom the *faithless* priests and other Jewish men have married personify the *abominations of the nations* ethos. Israel is clearly to avoid abominations. The separation of the Israelite men from the foreign women is symbolic of their separation from the abominations of the nations which they are to avoid.

The Nehemiah mission has a two-edged focus, i.e. internal inter-Jewish conflict and the external opposition embodied in the resistance strategies of Sanballot and company. The economic restructuring of Judah can be described as being an internal matter. Within the internal paradigm, the social conflict is between the *Jews and priests*, on the one side, as opposed to the *nobles and officials* on the other side (Neh 2:16). The fortification of the city walls is the external problem faced by Nehemiah. The external problem, in essence, is a military-oriented problem. Armed conflict, or the threat thereof, undergirds the Nehemiah mission of restoring the city walls. Nehemiah blatantly and categorically denies the opposition any opportunity to participate in the restructuring of Israel. Nehemiah emphatically claims that the opposition has no historic right to participate in national reconstruction. Furthermore,

the opposition is warned that any physical or armed resistance on their part will be met with a greater level of armed confrontation from the Israelite wall-builders and warriors.

Nehemiah's mission initially starts off with a fundamental emphasis and dependency upon an imperial decree from the Persian court. However, the Nehemiah mission reflects a radical shift in the authorial base of his mission. He no longer depends on imperial decrees to help resolve any situation of conflict. Rather, Nehemiah reflects an explicit and unashamed dependency on military power in order to guarantee that his mission is ultimately accomplished. Nehemiah is not afraid to announce that he will certainly use military power to accomplish his mission. It will be demonstrated, below, that the Ezra 1-6, and Ezra 7-10 literary units, in contrast, reflect a primary dependency upon imperial decrees as a means of resolving social conflict which was inherently a part of the reconstruction of Israel during the Second Temple period.

The above observations concerning the classification of socio-ethnic terminology, while not exhaustive, serve to illustrate the necessity of social class struggle as a hermeneutical key to the E-N literature. Class struggle, therefore, becomes the fundamental hermeneutical key which promises to unlock interpretive nuances embedded within the literary structure and composition of the E-N text itself. Here, we will do well to repeat the concept of struggle as outlined by Mosala:

> The struggle is, depending on the class forces involved, either to harmonise the

> contradictions inherent in the works and events or to highlight them with a view toward allowing social class choices in their appropriation (Mosala 1989:32).
>
> The category of social struggle as a biblical hermeneutical tool necessitates a historical-critical starting point for an exegesis ... The questions that emanate from this approach are, among others: What historical point is reflected by the discursive practice this text represents? What are the social, cultural class, gender and racial issues at work in this text? What is the ideological-spiritual agenda of the text, that is, how does the text itself seek to be understood (Mosala 1989:34-35)?

E-N is thus a document which describes and records the process of return, reformation and reconstitution of the nation of Israel in the post-Babylonian era. It is a document of reconstruction which witnesses to intense class conflict determining which ruling elite is ultimately to govern the region, control the resources of the land and dictate the character of national identity. The E-N text narrates this story of reconstruction by means of three literary units, from the perspective of the people returning to the land from Babylonian exile. We now turn to an analysis of the structure of the E-N text in terms of its three identifiable literary units.

4.2 THREE STRUCTURAL UNITS IN THE EZRA-NEHEMIAH LITERATURE

***The [S-Z] unit: Ideology and National Symbols (Ezra 1-6)*:** National reconstruction is a process which presupposes the creation and nurturing of an ideological centre, i.e. a tangible symbol which creates and sustains a sense of belonging, loyalty and self-worth. National symbols play a very important role in terms of reinforcing and,

indeed, creating a national identity. For post-Babylonian Israel, rebuilding the temple is the first priority in the creation of a symbol, since it is this symbol which would potentially create a paradigm of meaning in a context of socio-ethnic and religio-cultural uncertainty. However, the temple as a symbol of 'national' unity and 'collective' identity was allowed to function as such only within the religio-cultural confines of the Golah community, since for the majority of the population, the temple as an institution serving the purposes of the wealthy in Israelite society symbolised oppressive and exploitative economic policies (*see e.g.* Amos 5).

Excursus: Temple Ideology

The intense focus of the [S-Z] unit on the rebuilding of the temple necessitates a brief excursus on the role and function of the temple within the broader context of the Persian colonial period and the narrower context of the post-Babylonian Israelite community in Palestine. For this purpose we will depend heavily on the work of Lundquist (1983, 1988,) and Blenkinsopp (1991b).

Lundquist defines a temple as:

> ... an association of symbols and practice that we find connected in the ancient world with both natural mountains/high places (the *temple* par excellence) and edifices. The set of symbols and practices include, but are not exhausted by, the following: the cosmic mountain, the primordial mound, waters of life, the tree of life, sacral space, and the celestial prototype of the earthly. These emphasize spatial orientation and the ritual calendar;...the concept of "center" according to which the temple is the ideological, and in many cases the physical center of the community; ... formal covenant ceremonies in connection with the promulgation of law; animal sacrifice; secrecy; and the extensive economic and political impact of the temple in society (Lundquist 1988:294).

In his analysis of the role of temples, Lundquist (1988) interprets temple ideology in terms of three essential components: First, the king builds/restores a temple. Second, the legitimation of the temple is ritually celebrated through a covenant process and third, the content of the covenant is customary law. He succinctly summarises his hypothesis as follows:

> Thus it is my contention that the building or restoration of temples served as the impetus in the ancient Near East for the "codification" of customary law.

> Let me put it succinctly: The temple founds (legitimizes) the state; covenant binds the foundation; law underlies the covenant (Lundquist 1988:293).

In other words, in addition to the temple serving as that institution which provides a spiritual-ideological paradigm of cosmic order as opposed to the chaos of the universe (here referring to the Golah's experience of chaos *vis-a-vis* political banishment to Babylon), the temple also provides an ideological context for the promulgation of the ideals of justice (Lundquist 1988:297, 299). These ideals are expressed within the context of temple ritual, Ezra's giving of the law being a classic example.

While Lundquist's work heightens our awareness of the ideological/ritual complex of temple building/restoration, in general, the work of Blenkinsopp sensitizes us to the sociopolitical and economic function of temples in the Achaemenid empire, in particular. Blenkinsopp uses comparative data from temples in other parts of the Achaemenid empire, especially those in Asia Minor and Mesopotamia. Such comparative material, claims Blenkinsopp (1991b:22), "at least permit the setting up and testing of different models in the light of which the situation in the province of Judah can be reviewed." Blenkinsopp's exhaustive, penetrating and convincing analysis is summarised as follows:

> In keeping with a policy pursued in other parts of the empire, the imperial government encouraged the establishment of a dominant elite of proven loyalty in the province of Judah, a politically sensitive region in view of its proximity to Egypt. This new entity was recruited from the Jewish ethnic minority in Babylonia, settled there some two generations previously, and in the nature of the case only those of some social and economic standing, who has also resisted assimilation, would have had the ability and the motivation to answer the call. As an essential element of the establishment of a viable polity in the province, and again in keeping with well-attested Achaemenid practice, the imperial government **mandated,** rather than permitted, the rebuilding of the temple and financed the project out of the imperial and satrapal treasury. The result was the emergence, in the early decades of Achaemenid rule, of a semi-autonomous temple-community controlled by the dominant stratum of Babylonian immigrants, *the sons of the Golah* of Ezra-Nehemiah ... The proposal is, then, that the Babylonian immigrants imported and succeeded in imposing, the social arrangements with which they had become familiar in the diaspora. They reconstituted their own assembly, organised according to ancestral houses including free, property-owning citizens and temple personnel, under the leadership of tribal leaders and the supervision of an imperial representative, in a cohesive social entity which, while allowing for additional adherents, was jealously protective of its status and privileges....For this new form of social organization to be viable two goals had to be attained. The immigrants had to win back the land redistributed to the peasantry after the deportations, and they had to rebuild and secure control of the temple as the sociopolitical and religious center of gravity of their existence ([bold

emphasis mine] Blenkinsopp 1991b:50-53).
The significance of Lundquist's and Blenkinsopp's study for an analysis of the [S-Z] literary unit in particular, is that it provides details for constructing the material context of the text *(see* Chapter 7 below for further analysis). What their analyses show is that the heightened focus on the rebuilding of the temple in [S-Z] draws attention to the temple as a catalyst of economic exchange as well as a promoter of social cohesion. The temple was certainly a point of convergence for the symbolic structures of the region (Jerusalem-Judah, and more likely including Samaria), and an emblem of collective identity (Blenkinsopp 1991b:26). However, the E-N text makes it particularly clear that the nature of the collective identity was particularistic and exclusionary.

The studies of Lundquist and Blenkinsopp show that an analysis of the role of the temple in society, especially during the Persian period, must be undertaken in terms of its ideological/ritual complex as well as sociopolitical and economic dynamics. These dynamics become particularly interesting when one notes the colonial nature of the context, i.e. a context of limited autonomy for Jerusalem-Judah, indeed the province Beyond the River. The nexus of Persian political ideology and the ideology of the E-N text is thus best illustrated by [S-Z] narrative which exposes the radical quest of the Golah to build the Second Temple, the house of God in Jerusalem.

Thus, the emphasis of the [S-Z] unit on temple building is clearly understood to have the potential of mobilising people, especially the Golah, around their painful past, thereby, providing a familiar paradigm of meaning in the geo-political context, Palestine. The [S-Z] material, reflecting the interests of the Golah, is therefore justifiably obsessed with the programme to rebuild and control the temple, the ideological nerve center for Palestine.

The six chapters in this unit are extremely stylised, and the content which they cover can be summarised and schematized as follows:

Ez 1:1-11	*King Cyrus of Persia promulgates a decree which makes it possible for previously-deported Jews to return to their homeland and to rebuild their temple in Jerusalem.*

Ez 2:1-70	*The returnees are listed, and their problem-free resettlement in the land is described. More particularly, the list particularises those who are returning as having been deported by Nebuchadnezzar, the first sign of a narrowing of the universal and global invitation of Cyrus to all who claim to be God's people (Ez 1:3).*
Ez 3:1-13	*The altar and temple foundations are built, reflecting the fulfillment of the decree of King Cyrus.*
Ez 4:1-24	*The building programme is halted by the opposition, through securing a Persian restraining order in the form of a decree from Artaxerxes.*
Ez 5:1-6:14	*The building programme resumes because King Darius issues a decree to this effect. However, the compilers summarise the section by making the three Persian kings, namely Cyrus, Artaxerxes and Darius speak with one voice (see Ez 6:14).*
Ez 6:15-22	*This redactional piece describes the celebration ceremonies in honour of a completed building programme.*

The mandates which guide the first phase of reconstruction (Ezra 1-6) are the imperial decrees of Cyrus, Artaxerxes and Darius. In short, the mission of the first wave of returnees is to rebuild the temple. Contrary to expectations, the first literary unit focuses not so much on the actual physical construction of the building, but on the forces and mechanisms which radically question the legitimacy of the group of returnees *vis-a-vis* their exclusive right to build the temple. The dominant motif in this structural unit can be described in terms of a legitimacy struggle which ensues between those who return to the land and those who had not been deported by the Babylonians. Put differently, it is a battle between those who are able to provide evidence of Babylonian-Persian colonial experience (i.e. deportation and repatriation

from Babylon) and those who cannot.

The *people of the land*, a synonym for the forces of opposition, are described as desperately wanting to be a part of the rebuilding programme. The returning exiles, however, forcefully and radically exclude the people of the land from participation in the building programme. In addition, the returnees deny the people of the land access to the traditions which they claim to share with the returnees. The people of the land are told that they have no historical claim to either the land or the religious heritage of the Jews (Ez 4:3; Neh 2:20).

There is no doubt that the opposition to the reconstruction and development programme of the returnees is powerful. The compiler(s) of the unit emphasise the magnitude and power of the opposition by making explicit the names of the leaders of the opposition forces (Ez 4:7-11). In other words, the *troublemakers*, at least on a leadership level, are known by name. It appears that the aim here is to show that the returnees ought not to stand a chance against the opposition. The image created is that the entire administrative force of the province Beyond the River, i.e. every conceivable thread of opposition, is mustered to frustrate the building programme. Whether that opposition occurs in the days of King Cyrus, Artaxerxes or Darius, the point made by the [S-Z] material is that, by all counts, the rebuilding project should have failed, in spite of the fact that the prophets of God are on the side of the returnees, providing the necessary theological and spiritual support that the returnees

needed (Ez 5:1).

However, in the final analysis, the Persian regime decides that the returnees and not the local inhabitants of the land are the legitimate carriers of the tradition. Therefore, the Persian court issues imperial decrees to allow the returnees to rebuild the temple and, thereby, monopolize the symbols of the Jewish tradition.

In Ezra 6, the [S-Z] material moves to its ultimate objective, that of celebrating victory over the enemies and the completion of the temple-building project. The literary-ideological agenda of the [S-Z] material is now made explicit. The compiler writes, aptly exposing the ideological agenda of the returnees:

> They finished their building by decree [טעם] of the God of Israel and by decree [טעם] of Cyrus, Darius, and King Artaxerxes of Persia (Ez 6:14).

The decrees of God and the Persian kings are placed on the same level. The compilers have made sure that there is no mistaking who it is that deserves praise and worship *vis-a-vis* a completed rebuilding programme.

The compilers add a description of a dedicatory celebration in Ezra 6:16-21, whose redactional character is evident. In the last statement of the redactional unit, indeed, also the last words of the [S-Z] structural unit, the dominant literary-ideological agenda emerges again:

> With joy they celebrated the festival of unleavened bread seven days; for the Lord had made them joyful, and had turned the heart of the *king of **Assyria**

to them, so that he aided them in the work on the house of God, the God of Israel (Ez 6:22).

** King of Assyria: The context of Ezra 6 suggests that this is most likely a reference to Darius, king of Persia, although, such a position does not satisfactorily resolve the difficulty created by the explicit reference to 'king of Assyria'. See Williamson (1985:85) for further discussion.*

There is no more doubt left *vis-a-vis* the literary-ideological orientation of the [S-Z] unit. A completed house of God in Jerusalem is always to be remembered in honour of God and Emperor alike. The imperial decrees of Persia are not only equated with the decrees of the God of Israel, but are consciously placed at the centre of the literary unit as its literary-ideological interpretive grid.

Excursus: Rebuilding a temple and city walls?

The overall focus of the [S-Z] literary unit is indeed the rebuilding of the temple. However, we cannot ignore the literary and historical problems created by the reference in Ezra 4:12 which describes the rebuilding programme as including the rebuilding of the city walls, the task traditionally associated with Nehemiah. It has thus been said that the [S-Z] unit reflects a conflation of either time periods or building projects. In other words, the rebuilding programme of Ezra 1-6 incorporates more than the temple rebuilding alone.

The rebuilding of the temple is certainly a major focus of the [S-Z] unit, as the decrees of Cyrus, Artaxerxes and Darius indicate. However, Ezra 4:12-13 describes the returnees as finishing the walls of the city as well as the foundations (presumably of the temple). Are we to assume from the text that the city walls are built first and only afterwards the temple rebuilt?

King Artaxerxes issues a decree that the *city* [וקריתא] not be rebuilt (Ez 4:21). The reply from Persia is premised on fear for a rebuilt *city*. The compilers, sharing a different interpretation, have certainly interpreted the decree of the King in terms of putting a halt to the rebuilding of [בית־אלהא די בירושלם] the *house of God in Jerusalem* (Ez 4:24). Thus, the opposition forces, it seems, overstate their case by misrepresenting the nature of the rebuilding programme. They seem to equate the rebuilding of the **temple** with the rebuilding of the **city.** On the other hand, the E-N text presents the interest of the returnees in purely religio-cultural terms, which seems a rather naïve literary strategy in light of the above excursus on temple ideology.

What we have, then, in Ezra 4 is not necessarily historically problematic. Instead, we seem to have a text preserving, by default, two interpretations of the same event. The one interpretation confines itself to the rebuilding of the house of God in Jerusalem, a returnees' perspective. The other interpretation locates the rebuilding programme in its political-economic context (Ez 4:13) - a rebuilt temple as **a rebuilt city** which, given the history and legacy of Jerusalem, ultimately poses an economic threat to Persian hegemony in the region. The ideological agenda of the temple building community is not visible in the narrower context of the opposition narrative in Ezra 4. At this point in the story we can only say that the returnees building and supervising the rebuilding of the temple simply want to rebuild **the house of God in Jerusalem,** i.e. a temple for **religious** purposes.

The reason for rehearsing this rather straightforward detail is to compare and contrast the ideological agendas of the returnees with that of the voices of opposition. The opposition forces have painted a *worst-case* scenario for the Persian king to consider, whereby they convince the king to bring the building of the *city* to a grinding halt. The ideological warfare is contrasted with what one might classify as the *political-economic naiveté* of the returning Babylonian exiles. However, in appreciating that the ultimate thrust of the [S-Z] literary unit, as far as the compilers of the text are concerned, is the rebuilding of the temple, as made explicit in Ezra 6:14, if we accept the thesis that temples in the Ancient Near East, especially during the Persian period, function as the provincial exchequer, then we have to modify our assessment of the returnees as being naïve. The control of the temple effectively means control of the region, since all taxes, custom and toll are brought to the temple and administered by temple personnel.

The [S-Z] unit is a bloc of literature which, on the surface, is thoroughly *religious* or

theological in character, if one contrasts this with the *political-economic* tone of the opposition. Yet, the silence of the text in terms of the political-economic agenda of the returnees is astounding. Are the returnees not aware of the political-economic power that is to be theirs once they have completed the rebuilding of the house of God in Jerusalem? The opposition certainly reflects an awareness of the power potential. However, the [S-Z] unit, indeed the E-N text in general, by virtue of its *theological* discourse has masked the rather obvious *political-economic* power dimension which is the natural consequence of a rebuilt temple. The response from the Persian regime suggests that the King understands very clearly the political-economic implications of a disloyal Jerusalem temple community. The threat of the loss of Persian hegemonic control of a potentially wealthy economy is not to be treated lightly. It is no wonder that the building programme is brought to a grinding halt by means of an imperial decree.

In sum, even though the returnees encounter radical opposition, they ultimately emerge victorious by being allowed by the Persian regime to complete the building of the temple. The [S-Z] unit is, thus, appropriately concluded with a feast of celebration for a mission completed. The celebratory community not only gives thanks to God for its success. It also gives explicit thanks to the Persian regime. The imperial decrees of Persia and the decrees of God, at this sacred moment of historical rememberance, are eternally united. The unique combination of decrees suggests that there is no better way of understanding and appreciating the structure of the [S-Z] unit other than with

reference to the role of imperial decrees.

It would appear that with the primary ideological symbol, indeed the political-economic centre (i.e., the house of God in Jerusalem) in place, the next ideological phase of national reconstruction could commence, namely the religio-cultural reform as headed by Ezra. To this we now turn our attention.

The [E] unit: Religio-Cultural Reform (Ezra 7-10): The following literary unit in E-N is Ezra 7-10, here called the [E] unit. It is in this unit that Ezra's Persian mandate is made explicit through the medium of an imperial decree from King Artaxerxes. The extensive powers granted to Ezra by this imperial decree help to explain the *success* of the Ezra mission, namely his religio-cultural reform programme. It is this programme that ultimately set the parameters for membership to the Judah-Jerusalem community. These parameters necessitated, indeed legislated, the separation of non-Jewish wives from their Jewish husbands. This then is the general focus of the [E] literary unit. Let us look more closely at this literary unit in terms of a literary-ideological paradigm.

There is a sense in which one could argue that with a visible ideological centre in place, i.e. the political-economic structures of the day symbolised by the rebuilt temple, the next logical phase of national reconstruction would revolve around issues related to who would control and be admitted as members to this temple-based community. In essence, the next phase of national reconstruction could be described

as cultural/cultic redefinition. This assertion is made simply on the strength of the sequential nature of the narrative. However, as we said above, the sequential narrative development is on the level of, and motivated by, a particular ideological commitment of the compilers and not by a desire to communicate historical accuracy.

Excursus: Dating of Ezra

Scholars have long since debated the date of Ezra's return to Judah-Jerusalem (*see* Emerton 1966; Morgenstern 1962; Tuland 1974; Wright 1947/1958). There may be some usefulness in establishing the precise historical moment for the events recorded in E-N. However, the interest focused on the precise date of arrival of Ezra in Jerusalem correctly deserves the critique of Kraemer (1993), that E-N studies is dominated by a historicist bent. Similarly, Carroll (1993:6f) has explained, convincingly, that the scholarly obsession with chronological accuracy in biblical scholarship is a legacy of post-Enlightenment historiographical *historicist* assumptions. He notes that much of scholarship assumes that the biblical writers recorded the facts, even facts about the distant past, to write history, not fiction. The biblical writers are thus treated as "rational, even rationalistic, authors sifting out history from legend, facts from fiction and generally favouring history over legend and fact over fiction" (Carroll 1993:6). If one holds such assumptions in reading the mission of Ezra, one cannot help but stumble over the historical inaccuracies concerning the dating of Ezra's mission.

The mission of Ezra, which is the exclusive focus of Ezra 7-10, is set apart from the first literary unit by the introductory words, ואחר הדברים האלה, *[After these things* (Ez 7:1)], clearly a redactional comment intended to link the former literary unit (i.e. Ezra 1-6) with the ensuing Ezra mission which took place in another time period. We must observe that the dating for the Ezra mission itself is described twice. The first date is really only a time frame, indeed an ideological time frame, namely "...in the reign of King Artaxerxes" (Ez 7:1; 8:1). There is no attempt here to give explicit details about the precise historical moment. The motif, it would appear, leans more in the direction of an ideological comment orienting the reader to the general time period. A few verses later, (7:7-8), a very different attempt locates the return of Ezra and his entourage during the fifth month of the seventh year of King Artaxerxes.

It would appear that we have two redactional moments reflecting different ideological interests, contrasting a redactor whose interest is not in the finer details of the dating with a redactor whose interest is the opposite. The view taken here is that it is unnecessary to engage in a debate to try to establish the exact *historical* moment of

the mission of Ezra.

With Ezra's mandate, membership and allegiance to the reestablished ideological centre, i.e. the Second Temple, is radically redefined. Legal and official genealogical evidence(=proof) coupled with the experience of political exile becomes the criterion of citizenship in the newly-emerging society. The mission of Ezra is therefore essentially that of firmly establishing the identity of those who are to be a fundamental part of the new society. The consequence of the exercise is to establish, beyond reasonable doubt, who is to be excluded from membership and citizenship in a post-Babylonian Judah.

Ezra receives his mandate directly from the Persian government headquarters. He is directed to teach and to implement the law of Moses within the context of post-exilic Jerusalem-Judah, which has only recently succeeded in rebuilding a temple in Jerusalem. Ezra, himself, carries from Persia the scroll containing the law of Moses. The implemention of the Torah of Moses, we can say, is the religious aspect of Ezra's mission. What the mandate means in practical terms, or put differently, how this *religious* component was fleshed out *culturally*, deserves close attention. Ezra's *religious* outlook provides and necessitates a new cultural criterion for membership in the newly-rebuilt temple-based community. It is in the religio-cultural context that wives of foreign descent are radically excluded from the now newly-defined temple-community.

In sum, the text makes it very clear that the religio-cultural mission of Ezra is mandated, indeed legislated, by the ruling colonial regime. To this end, Ezra secures an imperial decree which underscores his legitimacy and guarantees the success of his mission.

Ezra's religio-cultural reform programme is complemented by Nehemiah's fortification of the city walls and the restructuring of the economy of Jerusalem-Judah, which then brings us to the third literary unit of E-N and the third phase of national reconstruction, *viz.* the mission of Nehemiah.

The [N] unit: Rebuilding City Walls and Restructuring the Economy (Nehemiah 1-13): The third identifiable literary unit within the E-N corpus focuses on the mission of Nehemiah. Nehemiah's mission is essentially the rebuilding of the city walls and the restructuring of the national economy. He, like Ezra, also receives permission from King Artaxerxes to return to Jerusalem to carry out various reform measures. The difference between the other units and the [N] unit is that the [N] unit has no explicit imperial decree comparable to that of the [S-Z] and the [E] literary units. However, the point must be made that the Nehemiah mission only occurs after he is able to secure various *letters from the king* [אגרות המלך - Neh 2:9]. The letters are intended to provide the necessary political, economic and ideological legitimacy needed by Nehemiah as he reenters the land of his ancestors.

The literary record of the Nehemiah programme is complicated by the scrambled and somewhat confused nature of the source material in this third literary unit. At one point Nehemiah functions as a governor, enabling him to carry out a number of reforms. There are certainly several competing motifs within the Nehemiah block. However, it seems significant that the compiler of the material makes a special effort to focus on Nehemiah's economic reform strategies, which included some very challenging and creative personal sacrifices on the part of Nehemiah, the governor. It does seem that his reinstitution of the sabbath principle of economics is of primary importance. Tithing is reintroduced and debt enslavement becomes a primary theme during Nehemiah's reign. In other words, in spite of the theological nature of his reform programme, its result certainly has a direct bearing on the economy.

It is also important to note that the compiler/redactor has made a point to present Nehemiah and Ezra as contemporaries (cf.Neh 8:9), albeit the attempt is chronologically and historically problematic. It is in this way that the compiler wishes to communicate that Ezra and Nehemiah are part of the same ideological spectrum.

4.3 COMPARING AND CONTRASTING THE THREE STRUCTURAL UNITS

Contrasting personality portraits and roles: The most striking difference between the [S-Z] unit and that of [E] and [N] is that, while the officially sanctioned leaders in the [S-Z] material are Zerubbabel and Sheshbazzar, they are not made to be the dominant

personalities in the unit. Just the contrary is true for the [E] and [N] units. Ezra and Nehemiah do function as both officially sanctioned leaders and dominant personalities. Also, the [S-Z] unit is dominated by a profuse exchange of documents between the Persian court and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, long and detailed genealogical lists, political correspondence (personal letters), and descriptions of the meticulous counting of gifts for the new temple (especially those gifts from the Persian court). The focus in the [S-Z] unit is therefore not so much on the accomplishments of Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel, but rather on the actual process and threats to the altar and temple rebuilding process. At its deepest and most fundamental level, the dominating issue and motif of the [S-Z] unit is a crisis of legitimacy. In other words, the privileged status of the returning former-elite *[Golah]* is radically questioned and challenged by the leadership of the *people of the land*, personified in the text as the governors of the province Beyond the River and their petty officials. The question guiding the suspicion of the *people of the land* is related to the fact of the returnees, alone, enjoying the legitimacy to claim exclusive access to the reconstruction and development of the new Israel.

The [E] and [N] material is characterised by part-autobiographical and part-narrative-descriptive data. However, the two units are essentially concerned with describing reconstruction in terms of the personal achievements of the main characters, Ezra and Nehemiah. The unit is therefore person-based, not issue-based as is the [S-Z] unit. The entire religio-cultural redefinition programme of Ezra and the fortification of the city

and its economy by Nehemiah is presented as a fundamental part and result of the personal piety and political sensibilities of the personages involved. Ezra and Nehemiah are the ones who personally receive the mandates from Persia. They are the ones in whom Persia has invested political and economic power and they are the ones who enjoy the status of ideological legitimacy.

In contrast to Ezra and Nehemiah, Sheshbazzar's role as governor of Judah is stated almost incidentially (Ez 1:8,11; 5:14,16). There is no further elaboration concerning his political title and designation. The same can be said concerning the description of Zerubbabel. He occupies a minor role in the text until we reach Jerusalem itself (Ez 3:2ff). In Ezra 2:2 his role as leader is only implicitly stated. However, from Ezra 3:2ff Zerubbabel becomes the main spokesperson and authority figure in terms of the building programme (cf.Ez 3:8; 4:2-3).

The Ezra personality, unlike Sheshbazzar or Zerubbabel, is presented with genealogical justification (Ez 7:1-6), levitical legitimation (Ez 7:5b) and political influence (Ez 7:6b). Nehemiah is introduced to the reader simply as the son of Hacaliah (Neh 1:1) but later as a person who, with relative ease, is able to get all his requests sanctioned by the King (Neh 2:8). The primary reason for his success, according to the compiler, is Nehemiah's impeccable piety (cf.Neh 1:4-11; 2:4b).

***Different phases of reconstruction*:** Each of the three literary-ideological units ([S-Z],

[E] and [N]) has its own peculiar mechanisms which provide internal cohesion. In other words, they each telescope a particular phase of national reconstruction. It is in reference to a particular phase of reconstruction, not in a historical but in an ideological sense, that each unit can be described: [S-Z]=temple rebuilding; [E]=cultural reform; [N]=wall rebuilding and economic restructuring. A strict historical reading of the E-N data stumbles because of the *historical* inaccuracies. However, a literary-ideological reading, while recognising the historical element of the narrative, is nevertheless not bound by the assumption that the biblical writers are aiming to communicate historical truth; if, by historical truth, we mean the post-Enlightenment assumption that in order for history to be true it must be verifiable.

***A tri-partite symmetrical design*:** The thematic unity between the three E-N units is further emphasised by a shared tri-partite symmetrical design (Gunneweg 1985:30). Firstly, each unit focuses on the *return* of a group of exiles to Jerusalem. Each unit has a clearly defined and legitimated leadership. Furthermore, the returnees have a pre-planned agenda (e.g. to rebuild the temple [Ezra 1-6], to reestablish the law of Moses manifested through religio-cultural reform [Ezra 7-10], and to rebuild the city wall and the economic infrastructure [Nehemiah 1-13]). Secondly, each unit makes explicit some form of *resistance* to the pre-planned agenda. However, in each instance, the agenda or the mission of the returnees is accomplished. Therefore, thirdly, *success* is a common feature of each literary unit: the temple is eventually rebuilt, the community is eventually purified and redefined with the law of Moses as the fundamental basis,

and the walls are eventually completed and sabbath regulations and tithing reenforce a new economic order.

The three literary units are therefore bound together by their narratological structure and movement - *Return, Resistance, Success* - a structure similar to the narrative movement observed by Eskenazi (1988) in her analysis of the literary structure of E-N. However, Eskenasi seems to have overlooked the socio-ideological elements in the narrative which facilitated national reconstruction in the Second Temple period. The swift and definite literary movement towards the successful completion of the various projects, in the face of sometimes harsh opposition, begs the question: *What strategies enabled the success of the returnees?* The question then points us to the next structural literary feature of this narrative complex, namely Persian legitimation.

***An appeal to Persian legitimation*:** Each of the defined literary units has at its central core an imperial decree. The scholarly debate as to the authenticity of the decrees need not detain us here (see Rost 1961; Galling 1937; Bickerman 1946; Grosheide 1954; Haran 1986; Hensley 1977). We simply want to observe the literary symmetry provided by E-N's dependence on such documents. We notice that the Cyrus decree (Ez 1:1-4 [Hebrew]//Ez 6:3-5 [Aramaic]) facilitates the initial return to Jerusalem. The Darius decree (Ez 6:6-12 [Aramaic]) later permits the initial exiles to resume and complete the temple building project. The decree of Artaxerxes (Ez 7:11-26 [Aramaic]) provides the basis for Ezra's mission and grants Ezra far-reaching political,

juridical and religious power. Artaxerxes is also said to have granted Nehemiah permission to return (Neh 2:7-9), although we are not given the explicit details of the decree. Nevertheless, Nehemiah's return is legitimated by the royal colonial crown.

The literary location of the Hebrew version of the Cyrus decree (Ez 1:1-4) makes it very obvious that the entire restoration programme, according to the compilers, must be interpreted with gratitude toward the Persian crown. However, there is a stage during the restoration era when the Persian government apparently could not remember the epoch-making decree. The Persian archives are then searched (Ez 6:1) and a copy of the Cyrus decree is located, this time in an Aramaic version (Ez 6:3-5). On the basis of the decree, the rebuilding programme is then allowed to resume and is vigorously funded by the Persian regime (Ez 6:6-10). It is the hope (command?) of King Darius that the *Golah*, a developing temple-based community, will pray for the life of the king and his children (Ez 6:10b), especially since the Persian government is the primary funding agency. Indeed, the first literary unit of E-N anchors the temple-rebuilding celebration within the imperial decrees which made it possible (Ez 6:14b).

It is interesting to observe that all conflicting and factional parties appeal to the Persian government for ideological support. The crucial question to be asked now becomes: *What political mechanisms facilitated the dominance of one group over against the other*? In the E-N text, it is the returnees who ultimately emerge victorious and it is they alone who enjoy legitimacy from the imperial crown. It is they who now

have the exclusive cultural and political power to interpret Jewish law and tradition, to canonise as well as to enforce such interpretations.

The imperial decrees then provide the basis of the success of 1) the temple rebuilding, 2) the people's obedience to Ezra's promulgation of the law concerning mixed marriages and 3) the successful completion of the wall building programme supervised by Nehemiah. There is no doubt that the local opposition to the agenda of the returnees is strong and, to a limited extent, successful, but ultimately the opposition collapses and suffers radical exclusion from the newly-defined community centered in Jerusalem. The fact that the opposition claims allegiance to the same God as the returnees is not enough. They cry:

> Let us build with you, for we worship your God as you do and we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of King Esar-haddon of Assyria who brought us here (Ez 4:1-2).

The reply which echoes throughout the E-N narrative is:

> You shall have **no part** with us in building a house to our God; but we alone will build to the Lord, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus of Persia has commanded us (Ez 4:3; Neh 2:20; cf.Ez 6:21).

We are brought then to another literary-ideological feature which the literary units have in common, namely the ideology of separatism manifested through the language of exclusion, among other methods.

***The ideology of separatism and the language of exclusion*:** The most obvious, well known and, for some, probably the most embarrassing feature of the E-N material is

its ideology of separatism, an all-too familiar theme in Apartheid South Africa. While the theme is most pronounced by the compulsory divorce of those who have married unclean, impure foreign wives (Ezra 9-10), the entire E-N narrative complex is premised on this kind of ideology. There is, within the text itself, a debate on the very theme. Mallau (1988) has argued for the existence of a *liberal* wing within the priestly group, which does not subscribe to the dominant ideology of separatism permeating the E-N narrative. A close analysis of the theme is bound to reveal further fine distinctions *vis-a-vis* opposition to the separatist ideology. The point, here, is simply to observe the way in which the language of exclusion provides a literary-ideological unity between the three structural units of the E-N narrative.

There is one important distinction that must be made between the three literary units. There is the qualitative difference between the exclusivist orientation of the Ezra 1-6; Ezra 7-10 and the Nehemiah material. It appears that the Nehemiah literature is not as exclusivist-oriented as the two literary units which precede it. It also appears that the redactors of the previous two units have tried to *coopt* Nehemiah into an exclusivist paradigm (*see below for further discussion*).

It has been noted above that each of the literary units i.e., [S-Z], [E] and [N], has as its high point the successful completion of a stated mission followed by a ceremony of celebration. The completion of the temple building, for example, is followed by a celebration of the passover:

> [The lamb] was eaten by the people of Israel ***who had returned from exile***, and also by all those ***who had separated themselves*** from the pollutions of the nations of the land to worship the Lord (Ez 6:21 [italics mine]).

The high point of the Ezra mission must surely be the dissolution of the impure, unclean, mixed marriages bringing so much shame and disgrace onto the nation. A ceremony comparable to a Passover celebration in [S-Z] might well be the compilation of a new population register as indicated in Ezra 10:18f. The Passover celebration in its original context is a pre-liberation, pre-freedom ceremony. It is a ceremony which carries with it the expected separation of the Hebrew slaves from the evil and oppressive Egyptian regime. There seems to be a similar cultural expectation from the ability of the Ezra community to record precisely the people who no longer qualify for membership (Ez 10:18f). Can it then be that the act of compiling the list of the excommunicated from the assembly is indeed meant to parallel the crowning ceremony of the first literary unit? If nothing else, the lists of excommunicated members must surely signify the success of the Ezra mission.

The Nehemiah unit, while similar in terms of exclusivist orientation, is different from the others in that the completion of his mission, as described in the text, lacks a clear and immediate ceremonial act to celebrate the success of his mission. Initially, in the face of opposition, Nehemiah radically excludes his rivals from legitimate access to God. In his confrontation with his arch-enemies Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem, Nehemiah is quoted as saying to them:

> The God of heaven is the one who will give us success, and we his servants

> are going to start building: but you have ***no share or claim or historic right*** in Jerusalem (Neh 2:20) [emphasis mine].

The wall-rebuilding project is subsequently completed (Neh 7:1), but the details of its inaugural ceremony are given only much later in the narrative (*see* Neh 12:27f). The ceremony, unlike those of the previous units, is detached from the expected literary setting. In fact, we seem to have a rather *matter-of-fact* approach in the Nehemiah unit. The wall is completed (Neh 7:1) and, without any pomp and ceremony, the gatekeepers, singers and levites are set in place, with Hanani, the brother of Nehemiah, put in overall charge of Jerusalem. The wall-building programme (Neh 3-4) is somewhat abruptly interrupted by economic problems within the Nehemiah community. Thus, in Nehemiah 5, we read how Nehemiah provides economic correctives. His own altruistic economic stance is also clearly described (Neh 5:14-19). The wall-rebuilding theme is resumed in Nehemiah 6. However, the major theme here is not the wall *per se* but political intrigue and deception. Nehemiah's enemies are no doubt trying to harm him (Neh 6:2), but he survives the cunning of his enemies and is able to concentrate on finishing the wall. The wall motif does, however, provide the narrative frame for the intrigue. By the time we reach ch.7:1 the wall is suddenly completed but, as observed earlier, there is no pomp and ceremony accompanying it. Rather, what follows is the problematic repetition of the lists of returnees as described in Ezra 2.

The absence of an immediately recognisable *high point* for the Nehemiah mission

raises some redactional questions. There is a wall rededication ceremony described (Neh 12:27), but obviously the ceremony is not to feature as the literary-ideological high point of the completion of the wall. Also, a closer look at the ceremony in Nehemiah 12 reveals a rather inclusive perspective when compared to the ceremonies of the two prior units. For example, Nehemiah 12:27f does not attempt to radically redefine a cultic celebratory moment in terms of those who have returned and those who have separated themselves from the nations (*contra* Ez 6:21f), which suggests that the compiler possibly has removed the wall-rededication ceremony from its initial narrative position and has replaced it with a genealogical list. In so doing, the compiler creatively aligns Nehemiah with the exclusivist tendencies of the previous two literary units.

The same scenario can be imagined, assuming that the Nehemiah material is the oldest. In other words, the Nehemiah material, as it presently stands, forms the basis and the source document from which [S-Z] and [E] draw for information. This means that the Nehemiah material, with its miscellaneous content, receives its ideological structure only when the E-N corpus is finally joined together.

The end result is still the same in terms of our hypothesis. The Nehemiah literary unit, read on its own, does not reflect a corpus structured around exclusivist tendencies. They are certainly there, but the primary emphasis of the Nehemiah material, when detached from the [E] and [S-Z] literary units, reads as a biography of a well-meaning

politician who desperately wants his constituency to recognise that he too is a spiritual person. However, when read in conjuction with the [E] and [S-Z] material, Nehemiah is nothing more than a coopted Jewish governor made to be ideologically in tune with, and supportive of, the exclusivist tendencies of his support base.

The question in terms of the literary patterns already observed is: What then is the high point of the Nehemiah unit? Could the high point be the covenant which emerges in Nehemiah 10? In the light of the foregoing analysis of the literary structure of the [N] unit, this is a plausible hypothesis.

4.4 CONCLUSION

Each of the three literary units, namely the [S-Z], [E] and [N] units, is premised on, and legitimated by, an imperial decree. The point which the compilers seems to be emphasising is that without the official sanction of the Persian government, national reconstruction and development in post-Babylonian Judah would not have been possible. The Cyrus decree serves to set the literary-ideological orientation of the entire E-N corpus. It provides the fundamental basis of the entire restoration programme.

The decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, even though they may be considered to be problematic on a historical and literary level, are nevertheless crucial in terms of providing the literary-ideological framework for the E-N narrative. The structural

units are united in that they all locate the legitimacy of the victorious social class within the context of an imperial decree. The manner and context in which the decrees are quoted indicates a radical pro-Persian stance on the part of the compilers. The three literary units are at best uncritical, at worse supportive, of Persian colonialism. E-N reinterprets Persian colonial domination and exploitation positively.

This chapter of the current study shows that, as a text of reconstruction, E-N reflects not only a preoccupation with reconstruction and development of Israel in the Second Temple period, but also highlights the class conflict involved in the process of resettlement in the land. In fact, class struggle is an inherent part of the literary-ideological fabric of the E-N text. Furthermore, an analysis of the literary structure of E-N, taking into account the reality of class conflict, has substantiated our thesis that the literary structure of the text itself signifies the centrality of the imperial decrees. The final resolution to the ideological conflict between the competing factions, as well as the apparent historical and literary incongruencies of E-N, occurs when the role of the imperial decrees is considered central to the exegetical analysis of the E-N literature. It now remains, in the following chapters, to engage in an in-depth analysis of the discourse of E-N in terms of its power assumptions as well to attempt a decoding of the discourse of conflict within the E-N text.

CHAPTER 5

THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE AND THE EZRA-NEHEMIAH DISCOURSE

> It [ideology] represents the points where power impacts upon certain utterances and inscribes itself tacitly within them (Eagleton 1991:223).

The imperial decrees in E-N, especially Ezra 4-6, emerge from within the context of an extensive exchange of official political correspondence between the province Beyond the River and Persian colonial headquarters. The correspondence, which is primarily located in Ezra 4-6, reveals, more than any other, the nature of the conflict between עם־יהודה and עם־הארץ. Particularly intriguing is what is here called the politics of language. Not only are the exchanges exclusively in Aramaic, but the nature of the discourse is thoroughly ideological. Nowhere is there a record of any counter-correspondence from the עם־יהודה to the Persian crown and they are portrayed in the literature as the passive recipients of ideological slander generated by the עם־הארץ. And yet, the passive עם־יהודה emerge victorious within the context of literary and ideological warfare, an intriguing conclusion which makes an analysis of the discourse appealing.

In this chapter we examine closely the nature of the political correspondence between the province Beyond the River and the Persian court. In the political exchange, the exegete is able to identify the points at which power impacts upon certain utterances in the text, thereby tacitly inscribing itself into the text. An analysis of the *politics of language* promises to enable the development of fundamental appreciation for the

character of the discourse in E-N.

5.1 POLITICO-THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

Literary form and ideological character: In the review of E-N research in Chapter 1, above, it is noted that the Persian documents, especially those in Ezra 4-6, have already been the subject of scholarly debate for almost a century (*see* Hensley 1977:1-25). The debate has been characterized by the taking of positions for or against the authenticity of the documents and letters and has not led to development of scholarly consensus.

The E-N text, itself, seems to presuppose the authenticity of the decrees. The factions competing for power and control of Jerusalem-Judah both appeal to and premise their political and economic action on injunctions they consider to be documented in the imperial decrees. The Golah feel confident that they can *prove* the legitimacy of their claim controlling the rebuilding and reconstruction of Jerusalem-Judah, by pointing to the provisions of the imperial decrees of Persia.

***Beyond form-critical observations*:** There are two form-critical observations which enable the exegete to develop an awareness of the explicit role and function of the imperial decrees in the formation of E-N as well in as the process of resettlement in the land of the ancestors. *First,* the decrees of Artaxerxes (Ez 4:17f) and Darius (Ez 6:6f) are contained in the form of written communiqués issued by the Persian court,

through the colonial headquarters in Babylon, to the province Beyond the River. While the communiqués are called by different names, all of which are examined below, they all function to transmit the official imperial decrees which are of primary concern to this study.

The *second* form-critical observation is that the E-N text does not always preserve an entire decree, but, often, quotations or extracts from a longer decree. An example is the Aramaic version of the Cyrus decree in Ezra 6:3-5. In fact, one can argue that the decree of Artaxerxes (Ez 7:11-26), which mandates the mission of Ezra, is the only complete decree documented in the E-N literature. The above observations point to the decrees in E-N as *selective* historico-political memories, serving the purposes of the compilers of the E-N text. In order to appreciate the reasons that the text preserves what it does, the insights gained from a form-critical perspective, therefore, need to be augmented by analysis of the imperial texts preserved in E-N.

In the context of Ezra 4, King Artaxerxes is described as responding to the concerns of the opposition forces (i.e., the people of the land). The King responds in letter form [נשתונא] (Ez 4:23 cf.Ez 4:18; 5:5), in an official and direct response to a letter [אגרה] (Ez 4:8) which the opposition had sent to him, slandering the Jews who had returned from Babylon. The letter directed to King Artaxerxes from the עם־יהודה is written in Aramaic (Ez 4:7) and points out that the Jews have a history of subversive attacks on kings. The returnees are described as a seditious and dangerous people.

In Ezra 6, it is assumed that King Darius' response to the questions and concerns of the opposition is in the form of some sort of official correspondence. Ezra 6:1f, unlike Ezra 4:17,23, does not make explicit the literary form of the correspondence. We are left to assume that the instructions of King Darius to the Governor of the Province Beyond the River is an official decree [הנשתונה], which is presumably communicated in the form of a letter. The narrative simply reports that King Darius had issued a decree [טעם] that the Persian archives be searched in order to verify the claim of the Jews that King Cyrus had granted the returnees permission to rebuild and reconstruct the temple in Jerusalem.

Ezra 6:14, unequivocally, makes explicit the view that the successful completion of the rebuilding programme of the returning exiles is made possible only through the טעם of three different Persian Kings as well as the טעם of God. טעם, here, is used to describe the content and the form of the decrees of God as well as that of the Persian Kings which, on an ideological level, explicitly asserts that the decrees of God and the imperial decrees of Persia are of the same *quality, status and value*.

An appropriate reading of the imperial decrees seems to be an investigation into the ideological function of the decrees within the broader context of the E-N literature, rather than to confine analysis to the literary form of the decrees.

Bilingualism: E-N, like the book of Daniel, is distinctive in its bilingualism. It seems

more than coincidental that the Aramaic portions of E-N are dominated by political correspondence [*see the following chart*].

HEBREW AND ARAMAIC DISTRIBUTION PATTERNS

(Shaded area represents the Aramaic parts)
(Unshaded area represents Hebrew parts)

TEXT	THEME	CONTENTS-SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS
Ezra 1:1 - 4:7	Return & rebuilding of the temple	Cyrus' decree, lists of temple apparatus and gifts, genealogical lists
Ezra 4:8 - 6:18	Conflict between the returnees and the 'people of the land'	1. Letters of opposition (Ez 4:6-14), especially the letter from Rehum & Company to King Artaxerxes. 2. Persian response to the Rehum letter (=decree of Artaxerxes - Ez 4:17-22). 3. Letter of enquiry [opposition?] (Ez 5:7-17) from Governor Tattenai and Company to King Darius 4. Persian response to the Tattenai letter (=decree of Darius - Ez 6:6-12; including an Aramaic version of the Cyrus decree (Ez 6:3-5).
Ezra 6:19 - 7:11	A redactional conclusion attached to the end of the imperial decree of Darius. This is immediately followed by a Hebrew narrative that introduces Ezra.	Details of the celebrations at the completion of the temple.
Ezra 7:12-26	Ezra's commission to return and rebuild the culture of the Jews in Jerusalem-Judah	The imperial decree of Artaxerxes which provides Ezra with a broad range of juridical powers.
Ezra 7:27 - 10:44	Tracing of the development of the implementation of Ezra's ethics and theory of culture within Jerusalem-Judah.	Graphic details of worship ceremonies and public reading of the scriptures.
Neh 1:1 - 13:31	Tracing of Nehemiah's programme of developing a new economic order for Jerusalem-Judah.	Indirect references to imperial decrees (letters of permission) given to Nehemiah. Discusses economic conflicts which Nehemiah resolves by means of his political status.

Rosenthal (1974:5) points out other Aramaic passages in the Old Testament to include:

Daniel 2:4--7:28	***(five Oriental-heroic historical tales in which young Jewish men are the folk heroes)***
Jeremiah 10:11	***(a stray Aramaic sentence in a Hebrew context of denouncing idolatry)***
Genesis 31:47	***(two words translating a Hebrew toponym into Aramaic)***

The above chart indicates clearly the distribution of languages in E-N. The Hebrew

version of the decree of Cyrus (Ez 1:2-4) has an Aramaic counterpart (Ez 6:3-5) which provides a very different set of data. The decrees of Artaxerxes (Ez 4:17-23; 7:12-26) and Darius (Ez 6:6-12) are also in Aramaic. The Aramaic in which these decrees are written is "Official Aramaic" and "largely identical with the language used in other Official Aramaic texts" (Rosenthal 1974:6). It is uncertain whether E-N preserves part of or the entirety of the imperial decrees. Nevertheless, the decrees of Cyrus, Artaxerxes and Darius are quoted and are assumed to be formal documents. The decree of Artaxerxes mentioned in Neh 2, is qualitatively and quantitatively different from the decrees in the book of Ezra (*see more detailed discussion below*). The Nehemiah text provides no explicit detail as to the content of the decree nor does it specify the language of the *official* correspondence which had been given to Nehemiah. It is clear that the [S-Z] and [E] material makes explicit use of *Official Aramaic* to communicate content of the imperial decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes. What, then, is the purpose, if any, of the Aramaic language within the overall literary-ideological framework of the E-N narrative?

Eskenazi (1988), while not attempting to answer the issue of the use of Aramaic in E-N, does provide some clues as to the possible reasons for the frequent use of Aramaic. Eskenazi argues that there occurs a shift in the basis of authority in Second Temple Israel, a shift from the authority of oral communication to that of written communication. Eskenazi's theory of the shift of authority base is plausible and can be sustained with a few more observations. Aramaic is said to have been the official

language of the Achaemenid Empire (Rosenthal 1974:6). It is, therefore, natural that the correspondence between the opposition forces (who are, in fact, Persian government officials, e.g. Tattenai, Rehum) and Persian headquarters is in Aramaic. However, such a reason does not adequately account for the necessity of reproduction of the Official Aramaic in Jewish religio-cultural records. There is not sufficient evidence to show that the language paradigm for the Jewish community had yet been shifted from Hebrew to Aramaic. The subjects of the E-N text, are thought to have been Hebrew-speaking Jews, an obvious conclusion only if the exegete accepts that the original language of E-N was Hebrew (*contra* Bickerman 1946). Aramaic as the language of the elite would also give them the advantage of control of interpretation to those who knew only Hebrew.

While we may assume that Aramaic had not yet become the *lingua-franca* of the majority of the Jewish population in Jerusalem-Judah in the E-N era, we can safely assume that Jewish reformers such as Ezra and Nehemiah had been fully immersed in this language. Both Ezra and Nehemiah are considered to be skilled people within the context of Persian politics and culture. Their familiarity with the Aramaic language is probable, as is that of the former ruling class of Jews who had returned from Babylonian exile. We can conclude, then, that the E-N literature, with its huge portions of Aramaic, assumes a readership who, if not familiar with the Aramaic language, certainly have some respect for the authority of a document when quoted in the *official* colonial language. One can, then, plausibly argue that the E-N literature is

created for an elitist ruling class, familiar with the political power of language. Such a group could use Aramaic to buttress its elitist status while monopolising the finer skills of translating the meaning and significance of the precious Persian documents into Hebrew.

Furthermore, the compilers, in maintaining the Aramaic evidenced by their refusal to translate the political correspondence into Hebrew, are implicitly reflecting a compliance with colonial ideology. The preservation of Persian documents in their original language, within the broader Hebrew narrative framework, thus reflects an elitist mentality.

It is instructive to reflect on Nehemiah's attitude towards language. Nehemiah takes drastic measures against Jews who are not able to speak the language of Judah, which presumably is Hebrew. They are cursed and beaten and have their hair pulled out (Neh 13:25). Nehemiah's reaction to Jews who do not have a knowledge of the language of Judah might be considered extreme, but his reaction seems to reinforce the crucial role of language in political correspondence. It is, therefore, not too trivial a matter to consider the ideological role of the Aramaic documents in E-N and thereby conclude that E-N reflects elitist tendencies, particularly on the level of the politics of language.

There is no doubt that the narrative context of Ezra 4-6 is one of ideological warfare between עם־יהודה and עם־הארץ (Ez 4:4). It seems that the use of Aramaic forms

part of the warfare. The ability to quote the contents of political documents in Aramaic, the colonial language, communicates a level of legitimacy not otherwise possible. As has just been pointed out, if the audience of the text is Jewish and exclusively Hebrew-speaking, rather than being Jewish and partially Aramaic-speaking, there is no need for the use of Aramaic. If the audience is an aristocratic Persian-type of Jewish upper-class, then the sophistication and privileged status which comes with the technical ability to decode official political correspondence written in Aramaic is of utmost importance. The authority of the content of the *original* Aramaic documents is then the crucial element in the legitimisation of the elite status of its audience.

The use of Aramaic in E-N, therefore, does not appear to be accidental. One can only assume that the documents would be considered to be more authoritative if preserved in the *official* colonial language than would be the case if they were preserved in Hebrew, the language of the peasants. By the end of the eighth century, Aramaic had become an international language understood almost exclusively by high Assyrian and Jewish officials and not by the common people (*see* 2 Kings 18:26). In the sixth century, even though Aramaic had become the dominant language of official written communication in the Achaemenid empire and Mesopotamia, it had made only limited, though steady, headway as a spoken language in Palestine (Rosenthal 1974:6).

The use of Aramaic in E-N can, therefore, be understood as an attempt on the part of the compilers to buttress the class status of the elite, whose positions of privilege in society depend on Aramaic political documents as opposed to the will of the people. We can, therefore, assume that the legitimacy to rule Jerusalem-Judah in the E-N period is defined, in part, by the authority accorded to official political documents written in Aramaic.

5.2 TERMINOLOGY IN CONTEXT

Since it is often better to discuss terminology in context, in order to minimise the misrepresentation of the intention of the linguistic patterns and nuances, the following analysis of terminology is confined to the attributes which E-N ascribes to the political correspondence it preserves. One can suspect that political correspondence, more than any other, will reflect a linguistic paradigm in which power is most clearly expressed. It therefore makes sense to examine the extent to which the E-N text accords political power and authority to the political documents, as well as the extent to which it accords these documents religio-cultural significance. To this end a study of the political language of these documents and the status accorded to them by the E-N text is imperative.

Form-critical analysis considers the language-titles of the documents, while the authority given to the documents, seen in the way in which the documents are thought to have binding power (e.g. Ezra's power to enforce the legislation), is also examined.

There are essentially five terms used to classify the various kinds of documents in E-N. They have been extensively examined (Hensley 1977:84-94; Dion 1982a; 1982b; Fitzmyer 1982) and need only a brief treatment here. The five terms are: אגרה, דכרן, טעם, נשתון, פתגם. The following chart, which indicates the occurrences of the words within each literary unit, provides the basis for comparing and contrasting the nuances of meaning.

CLASSIFICATION OF TERMINOLOGY FOR POLITICAL CORRESPONDENCE & DOCUMENTS

Word	Translation	Ezr 4-6	Ezr 7-10	Neh 1-13	Other
אגרה	letter	4:8,11; 5:6		2:7,8,9; 6:5,17,19	II Chron 30:1,6 Es 9:26,29
דכרן	memorandum	6:2b			Ex 17:14; Mal 3:16 Ex 6:1
טעם	decree, command, order	4:4,8,9,17,19,21; 6:12,8,11,12,13,14	7:13,21,23		Dan 2:14; 3:4-6,10,12,29; 6:3,26-28 cf.Jonah 3:7; Dan 4:3
נשתון	official document, factual report, letter	4:7,18,23; 5:5	7:11		
פתגם	word, message, command, report, affair	4:17; 5:7,8,11; 6:1,2b-5,11			Dan 4:14

Rebuilding the temple: The decree of Cyrus has a dual character. It is both a verbal proclamation [ויעבר־קול בכל־מלכותו] (*lit.* and he caused a voice to pass

throughout his kingdom), as well as a written political document [וגם־במכתב] (Ez 1:1). The dual emphasis of oral *proclamation* and *written* document is to be remarked, especially, since Eskenazi convincingly argues that the E-N literature is indicative of the shift from the authority of oral tradition to that of the written word. The decree of Cyrus is the only decree in E-N which reflects a dual character. No technical term is used to describe this proclamation which is written down. The emphasis in Ezra 1, one could argue, is on the verbal proclamation and not the written word. Ezra 1:1 simply describes the document as וגם־במכתב (*lit.* and also put in writing). וגם־במכתב could be considered to be a general and neutral description of something that is put in writing. However, what at first might seem a neutral descriptive comment eventually takes on a radical ideological character which is not at all neutral. וגם־במכתב is synonymously described in Aramaic as a decree [טעם] and is to be considered, in terms of power and authority, to have the same binding quality and character as a decree [טעם] of God (*see* Ez 6:14).

The term, טעם, is used to describe the character of the Aramaic version of the Cyrus decree (i.e., Ez 6:3-5). The Aramaic version of the decree of Cyrus is found in written form, on a scroll with the heading "Memorandum" [דכרונה]. King Cyrus is described as having issued a document called a טעם. The term, טעם, commonly describes an order, a decree, information, attention or influence (Rosenthal 1974:85; Dion 1982b:79). In contrast, the Hebrew version of the Cyrus decree is described differently, as that which is put in writing [במכתב]. The basis of authority and the

terms of reference for the two versions of the decree are different. Whereas the Hebrew version places emphasis on the oral proclamation, the Aramaic version locates the authority for the same decree in its literary verifiability. The authoritative quality of the Cyrus טעם arises from the fact that it is a command, which emerges from within the Persian imperial court, indeed from the king himself.

The immediate context giving rise to the imperial decree of King Artaxerxes (Ez 4:17-22) is the political correspondence sent to Persian headquarters by certain Persian officials, including Tabeel, Rehum [whose title reads בעל־טעם - commander-in-charge], and those accompanying them (Ez 4:7-8). The correspondence from Rehum and company to King Artaxerxes is in the form of a letter [אגרה]. The term, אגרה, is a Persian loan-word used within the context of political and financial matters (Rosenthal 1974:58) and is considered a "generic term for all kinds of communication in epistolary style." (Dion 1982b:79). Also, אגרה, appears in the Bible only at Ezra 4:8. The reply from King Artaxerxes to Rehum is in the form of an official document [נשתונא] (Ez 4:23; 5:5). Rendering נשתונא with the English equivalent "letter" (e.g. NRSV) seems to minimise the political power which is vested in the "letter" such as that of King Artaxerxes to Nehemiah. Dion (1982b:80-81) observes that at three places in the book of Ezra, נשתונא, obviously refers to letters (Ez 4:7,18,23), and that the only suitable translation for each context is "document". Artaxerxes might well have sent a letter, but there is no doubt that the contents of the letter were more than just some general information. In other words, the form of the correspondence

was a נשתונא but the contents of the correspondence are clearly imperial orders and decrees relative to the situation in the province Beyond the River. The political power and ideological character of the content of the [נשתונא] is clearly illustrated in Ezra 4:21. King Artaxerxes issues an order [טעם] that the building programme of the Jews be stopped immediately, illustrating the level of political and ideological power which is invested in the "letter" from Artaxerxes. While the distinction between form and content may be obvious, the point being emphasized here is the misleading nature of translations. The king does not merely send a letter recommending that the building programme be stopped. The king *decrees* that all building activity be halted.

It is of note that the imperial decree, itself, in Ezra 4, does not occupy the central literary space. When contrasted with the literary style and technique of, for example, the decree of Darius (Ez 6:6-12), there is a marked difference. The Darius decree is forceful and straightforward. Since the final ruling of the Darius decree is positive for the returnees, there is every reason to make the Darius decree as explicit and forthright as possible. The negative consequences for the returnees of the imperial decree of Artaxerxes then might account for the deemphasis of the Artaxerxes decree. The deemphasis does not mean that the decree is any less binding on the returnees for it is the Artaxerxes decree that makes it possible for Rehum and company to use force and power [באדרע וחיל] (Ez 4:23) to stop the returnees from building their much-dreamed-of house of God. As a consequence, the correspondence from Artaxerxes has devastating results for the Jewish vision of reconstruction and development in

Jerusalem-Judah. The opposition, on the basis of an imperial decree, was able to use force (probably military force) legitimately to stop the energetic and diligent returnees from continuing to build their temple.

The decree of King Darius is precipitated by a letter [אגרתא] (Ez 5:6) which he receives from Tattenai, his governor of the province Beyond the River. While Ezra 5:6 describes Tattenai as sending a letter [אגרהא] to King Darius, the very next verse, i.e. verse 7, which appears to be a redactional comment, describes the same letter as an official report [פתגמא]. Is the distinction merely one between form and content, or a simple case of synonymous parallelism? The compilers of E-N present Governor Tattenai's ultimate concern as his desire to verify the decree [טעם] which had been issued by King Cyrus many years previously (Ez 5:17 cf.v.13). It is particularly crucial to establish such verification, since the returnees claim that the Cyrus decree provides them the legitimate right to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem. The official response of King Darius to the פתגמא of Tattenai is a series of commands, including a decree [טעם] (Ez 6:1) that the archives be searched for the supposedly-unknown original Cyrus decree. The action is strikingly similar to that of King Artaxerxes, who, in the previous narrative sequence, also issues a decree [טעם] commanding that archives be searched in order to verify certain claims made by the opposition (Ez 4:19). The parallel literary movement is striking, since both initiatives for Persian court verification are met with a positive and helpful response from the Persian king. Put differently, there is no hesitation on the part of the Persian court to

institute a Commission of Inquiry.

King Darius commands that Governor Tattenai and company allow the governor of the Jews, as well as the elders of the Jews, to rebuild the temple, without hindrance (Ez 6:7). By implication, Tattenai is told to stay out of the local politics of Jerusalem-Judah (*see* Ez 6:6b-7). Interestingly, there is no explicit mention of the *form* of the commands, in contrast to the explicitly described form, נִשְׁתְּוָנָא (Ez 4:23) of the response from King Artaxerxes, who makes a ruling on the matter of opposition to the Jews.

It can be concluded that the emphasis of Ezra 6 is not necessarily on the form but on the content of the imperial commands. Once the validity of the Cyrus decree is verified, the exclusive focus of the Darius 'decree' is the stipulations and orders which are binding on the opposition. We can only assume that King Darius, like King Artaxerxes, communicates his commands in the form of נִשְׁתְּוָנָא. While the E-N text does not make explicit the exact form of the decree of Darius, its content and its beneficiaries are unmistakably clear.

In what must certainly be the most ironic parallelism in the literary unit, the decree of King Darius requires that the opposition forces bear the financial costs incurred by the returnees as they continue to rebuild their house of God in Jerusalem (Ez 6:8f). In contrast to the prohibition ruling of King Artaxerxes in Ezra 4, the pro-building ruling

of King Darius, with the added feature that the opposition must pay for the cost of the rebuilding, is evidence of an ironic twist in the narrative. As if to add insult to injury, King Darius further decrees punishment against anyone who alters his commands [פתגמא].

The literary-ideological context of the decree of King Darius, as in the case of the decree of King Artaxerxes (Ez 4), is one of opposition to the building programme of the returnees. The אגרתא (Ez 5:6) from Tattenai to King Darius, re-described in the following verse as a פתגמא in Ezra 6:11, carries with it an explicitly judicial tone (cf.Dan 4:14). The compilers seem to stress that the tone of the opposition is more than simple disgruntlement. The opposition is judicial, carrying with it a legal penalty. The only other time that פתגמא is used in the context of a document is in Ezra 6:11. However, פתגמא is used in Ezra 6:11 in favour of the returnees, in contrast to its use in Ezra 5:6.

There is, therefore, a significant play of the use of the Persian loan-word פתגמא in terms of its ideological function. On the one hand, the opposition uses it to underscore the seriousness of the inquiry against the returnees (Ez 5:7). On the other hand, פתגמא is used to make just the opposite point, namely that the opposition dare not alter the decree of Darius which favoured the returnees. The judicial tone of the language emphasizes the seriousness, strength and political power of the opposition.

As noted above, there is an ironic twist in the Tattenai narrative in Ezra 5. The irony is that the opposition forces (in this case Tattenai and company) are ordered by King Darius (Ez 6:8f) to support, politically, economically and also ideologically, the rebuilding programme of the returnees. It is important to observe the extent to which the opposition is required to support the returnees. Not only must the opposition bear the financial cost of reconstruction but it is *ideologically-theologically* circumscribed by an imperial decree of Darius. In other words the imperial decree of Darius carries with it not only disastrous political and economic consequences for the opposition but also *ideological-spiritual* implications. The stipulations of the decree of Darius explicitly cross the political-economic boundary and enter the domain of spiritual-ideological concerns. They go beyond being merely a decree of the king to being considered, by the compilers of E-N, to be on the same ideological-spiritual level as a command of God. As if to balance the arrogance of such a claim, the king is described as making himself, as well as any future king, subject to his own decree (Ez 6:12). The universal and eternal implications of the scope of the decree are not to be missed or underestimated. In addition, King Darius' stated motivation for supporting the Jews in their rebuilding programme is that they may pray for the longevity of the king and his children (Ez 6:10b).

The purpose of noting the use of פתגמא is simply to bring attention to the play on words and the subtleties of language in a context of ideological warfare. There is certainly a difference between a decree [טעם], an official report [פתגמא] and a letter

[אגרה]. The literary-ideological observation, here, is that the meaning of words depend on who is actually using them and in what ideological context such words appear.

In sum, the [S-Z] literary unit reflects no consistency in its use of terms describing imperial decrees, in either content or form. What is noticeable is the narrative build-up toward a final and decisive combination of the political interests of a pragmatic colonial regime on the one hand, and on the other hand, the spiritual-ideological agenda of *the people of Judah* as they reestablish their hegemonic control of religio-cultic life in Judah-Jerusalem.

***Rebuilding the national culture*:** The mission of Ezra can be categorised as a *culture-building* mission. It is Ezra who develops a theology of strict cultural and spiritual separation of Jews from foreigners. The successful implementation of Ezra's theological ideal of *separation* from non-Jews is only possible because of the legitimacy and incredible power he enjoys as a result of an official imperial decree issued in his favour by King Artaxerxes (Ez 7:11f). The form of the decree of Artaxerxes is an official document/letter [הנשתון] (Ez 7:11). The נשתון removes all doubt about Ezra's legitimacy, including any doubt about the extent of his powers, which covered all areas of life (juridical, political, religious, economic).

In contrast to Ezra 1-6, there is, in Ezra 7, no explicitly stated context of *opposition*

which facilitates and precipitates the emergence of an imperial decree giving legitimacy to one group over against another. While the mixed-marriages débâcle (Ez 9-10) seems to be the primary focus of Ezra 7-10, the pretext of the Ezra mission is, however, explicitly stated by King Artaxerxes:

כל־קבל די מן־קדם מלכא ושבעת יעטהי שליח לבקרא על־יהוד ולירושלם בדת אלהך די בידך׃ (Ez 7:14)

Translation: *For you are sent by the king and his seven advisers to investigate concerning Judah and Jerusalem in terms of the law of God which is in your hand.*

ולהיבלה כסף ודהב די־מלכא ויעטוהי התנדבו לאלה ישראל די בירושלם משכנה׃ (Ez 7:15)

Translation: *And also to convey the silver and gold that the king and his advisers have freely offered to the God of Israel whose dwelling is in Jerusalem.*

Neither the pretexts mentions anything concerning the crisis of mixed marriages, although it is possible to interpret בדת אלהך די בידך as a reference to the problem of mixed marriages.

The unlimited legal powers granted to Ezra suggest that opposition to Ezra's mission certainly had been anticipated. For this reason, the Ezra mandate incorporates a warning to all possible opposition forces (Ez 7:26). Only consequentially, do the far-reaching powers which Ezra is granted enable him to force the *men* of Israel, the priests and levites to separate themselves from *the peoples of the lands and their abominations* (Ezra 9:1) [מעמי הארצות כתועבתיהם]. The abominable act which is alluded to in this verse is a euphemistic reference to the *foreign women of/from the peoples of the land* [נשים נכריות מעמי הארץ] (Ez 10:2b). The holy seed

[זרע הקדש], a synonym for the returned exiles, is to enforce a double separation: from the foreign wives [נשים נכריות] (Ez 10:2b), as well as separation from the peoples of the land [מעמי הארץ] (Ez 10:11-12). The double separation is more clearly understood within the motif of conquest which is so pervasive in Ezra 9-10.

> The question of intermarriage also serves as a reminder of the initial conquest. Prohibitions against associating with pre-Israelite occupants of the land go hand in hand with the command to possess the land (e.g. Deut 7:1ff.). The appearance of חרם in Ezra 10:8 invites the audience to remember the first conquest. This word is one of the main expressions of the notion for exterminating the occupants of the land, and is characteristic of the conquest period. In Ezra it is used for excluding faithless members from the Golah community...The unsavoury nature of the opposition is further established by linking them to the ancient abominations (תועבת). These happen to be the reasons why the original occupants had to be destroyed (Deut 13:15; 18:9,12 etc). Here in Ezra-Nehemiah it is the reason for not marrying any of them (Ezra 9:1,11,14) (Mitchell 1991b:14).

The issue of *anticipated* opposition emphasizes the point that the mission of Ezra is to proceed unhindered. Put differently, one could say that Ezra's legitimacy is written into the new constitution of Jerusalem-Judah and that it is, in fact, at the very core of the imperial decree of Artaxerxes. The King of Persia imbues Ezra with far-reaching juridical, political, religious and economic powers. Thus, any opposition to Ezra's interpretation of reality and his political judgement is guaranteed severe punishment. The penalty for opposing any of Ezra's measures ranges from the confiscation of the offender's property to imprisonment, banishment or the death penalty (Ez 7:21,26).

The explicit anticipation of opposition to Ezra's mission raises some serious concerns

about the credibility of Ezra's person and mission. It is not our purpose to debate here the historicity of Ezra. The secondary literature on the topic underscores the fact that the biblical data is too sparse and conflicting to canonise any position, on a purely historical level (cf.Lemche 1994). What does need to be emphasized is the ideological function of the decree which legitimises Ezra's mission. For the purposes of analysis, we, for now, assume the position of the compilers that Ezra is a historical person (*contra* Torrey). Given the assumption, we then ask questions about the ideological legitimisation of Ezra's mission through the Persian decree. The decree of Artaxerxes is clearly fundamental to the success of the Ezra mission itself. Ezra's mission would not have been successful without the guarantees of the imperial decree. The compilers of the text seem to have felt the need to, in fact, outline very explicitly and very clearly the legitimacy of Ezra and his mission by quoting extensively the Persian decree which undergirds and supports his mission. We see below that this is not the case for the Nehemiah mission. The compilers of the Nehemiah narrative apparently feel no need to engage in an exhaustive listing of the contents of the decree mandating Nehemiah's mission. This does not mean that Nehemiah's mission occurred without being premised on an imperial decree. The point is that the decree of Artaxerxes which legitimises Nehemiah's mission is qualitatively different from that of the decrees quoted in the book of Ezra.

In sum, the [E] presents its data in such a way as to suggest that the redevelopment of the cultural boundaries of the people of Judah was the primary focus of the Ezra

mission. The above analysis illustrates very clearly that such a mission could only be successful if it enjoyed the juridical and political muscle to implement its programme.

The decree of Artaxerxes [הנשתון] explicitly provided the Ezra mission the political spaces and legitimacy to accomplish his spiritual-ideological agenda, *viz.* the establishment of a Golah community in which there was no trace of defiled foreign blood.

Rebuilding the national economy: The Nehemiah narrative, in terms of the locating of and identifying of imperial decrees, is fairly straightforward. On the news of the bad situation prevailing in Judah (*see* Neh 1:1-3), Nehemiah prays a prayer of confession (Neh 1:4f) on behalf of the *sons of Israel* [בניישׂראל] who have sinned against God (Neh 1:6f). The prayer is followed by a description of Nehemiah's saddened face attracting the attention of Artaxerxes, King of Persia. Consequently, Nehemiah is able to evoke the sympathetic support of the Persian Crown who then asks Nehemiah, *What do you request?* (Neh 2:4). Nehemiah's response to the open-ended imperial inquiry is ambiguous. The ambiguity emerges when trying to identify the *real* subject of ואבנהו (Neh 2:5). Is this a reference to rebuilding the *city* where the graves of Nehemiah's ancestors are located, or the rebuilding of the *graves* in the city? Blenkinsopp (1988:214) comments that Nehemiah's answer to King Artaxerxes is:

> ... no doubt well rehearsed in advance [and] worded with great care. There is no mention of Jerusalem, the "rebellious and wicked city" of the royal firman

> issued just a few years earlier (Ezra 4:17-22). The issue is couched in personal rather than political terms with the mention of his ancestral tombs, a subject likely to arouse the sympathy and interest of the king. While Nehemiah does not exactly dissimulate his intent to rebuild the city, he manages to convey the impression that his main purpose is to restore the sepulchres of his ancestors.

In addition, Nehemiah asks the king to give him some letters [אגרות] (Neh 2:7) which he, in turn, can hand to the governors of the Province Beyond the River [על־פחוות עבר הנהר אשר]. Nehemiah explicitly states that the purpose of such letters would be to guarantee safe travel through the kingdom and into Judah. Nehemiah also requests, from the king, a second letter [ואגרת] with a specific focus, which is the royal provision of raw materials for the task which Nehemiah wants to accomplish, the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem (Neh 2:5). Specifically, Nehemiah wants to secure some timber "to make beams for the gates of the temple fortress, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I (Nehemiah) shall occupy" (Neh 2:8). We cannot speculate any further than saying that the imperial document, [אגרת], in effect, functions as an imperial decree(s) serving the ideological purpose of ensuring that Nehemiah and his entourage arrive safely in Judah, as well as securing material support (i.e., timber) for the rebuilding programme. The context is very different from that of the imperial decrees in Ezra, in which the Persian kings *initiate* repatriation, as well as overbearingly endowing the temple with gifts and the building programme with economic and logistical support. The king's open invitation to Nehemiah clearly provides a reversal in terms of initiating reparation. Nehemiah, and not the imperial court, takes the initiative to set out the content of the decree which would ultimately legitimise Nehemiah's mission (Williamson 1985:179).

The precise content of the אגרות may be forever lost to the contemporary reader. The letter may have contained additional information pertaining to Nehemiah's role as the *new* governor in the region. It is quite intriguing that, even though Nehemiah had an army at his disposal (Neh 2:9), he did not assume that military support is enough to guarantee a safe passage to Judah. He, in fact, needs official Persian legitimation and, at the very least, a letter which would guarantee his safety en-route to Judah.

We note above that the precise content of the letters of permission granted by King Artaxerxes to Nehemiah remain in the realm of speculation. However, it seems plausible to suggest that the letters probably contained the political mandate allowing Nehemiah to become the new governor, possibly the first governor, of independent Judah. Put differently, the letters of permission may have legitimised the formal separation of Judah as an independent district from the rest of the province Beyond the River. The hypothesis is based on the very strong assertions of Nehemiah concerning the exclusion of Samaritan-based opposition, personified in Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem, from any *historic* claim to Jerusalem (Neh 2:20). The opponents of Nehemiah are not petty local princes. As Myers (1965:101) points out, "they were Persian officials, at least nominally, and used their official status to harass him." Nehemiah, therefore, has to be certain that he has Persian backing for his claims and activities. It is in such a context that Nehemiah's response to the taunts of Sanballat and company must be understood. Nehemiah's reply, then, signifies that he has sufficient power and evidence to determine membership in בני־ישראל. Nehemiah

emphatically neutralizes Sanballat and company's threat of being accused of treason or subversion in the following manner:

> The God of heaven is the one who will give us success and we his servants are going to start building; but you have ***no share or claim or historic right*** in Jerusalem (Neh 2:20). [emphasis mine]

At this early stage in the Nehemiah narrative there is no explicit mention of the economic restructuring of the city. In this regard, Williamson (1985:179) argues that Nehemiah's statement/request - *to rebuild the city* (Neh 2:5) - would only be filled out in verse 8, and that his request therefore reads more like a *grant of wide-ranging authority.*

The mission of Nehemiah is characterised in the [N] literary unit as having two chief components. The first is the rebuilding of the city walls, which in effect amounted to the military refortification of the city. The second component was the restructuring of the economy (*see* Neh 5). The activities of Nehemiah, at first might seem to have gone beyond the narrow confines of his request to the king. However, if we accept that Nehemiah's request to the king was, indeed, a statement of principle, it is not difficult to locate Nehemiah's activities within the broader literary-ideological framework of E-N. What is to be noted, however, is that unlike the decree of Artaxerxes to Ezra as well as the decree of Darius directed to Tattenai, the decree of Artaxerxes to Nehemiah is extremely open-ended. If we assume, with Williamson, that the letters/decrees granted to Nehemiah were statements of principle, then we must also assume that there was a higher level of trust and confidence, on the part of

the Persian empire, in Nehemiah when compared to Ezra. Nehemiah, it seems, was granted total flexibility and freedom to interpret and implement the "rebuilding of the city and/or the ancestral graves" as he desired. The political power granted to Nehemiah surpassed even those granted to Ezra. Such wide ranging power granted to Nehemiah suggests that the letters/decrees, might well have included the official appointment of Nehemiah as the governor of Judah, an independent province.

It is the wide-ranging power granted to Nehemiah that assists the exegete in locating the literary-ideological position of Nehemiah's power-statements to the opposition forces. The exclusion of Sanballat and company from participation in the rebuilding of the city walls can more easily be explained in terms of the wide-ranging political power granted to Nehemiah via the letters/decrees issued by King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah's political power-base was extremely well-secured.

In terms of the economic restructuring of Judah, which had profound implications for the whole of the province Beyond the River, Nehemiah, once again, makes power-statements which on a diplomatic level go unchallenged. In other words, unlike the [S-Z] literary unit, there is here no recourse to the exchange of political correspondence between the Persian court and the local authorities. Also, unlike the [E] literary unit, there is here no need to make explicit the punishment which accompanies any challenge to the activity of the reformer, Nehemiah. Nehemiah is presented in the [N] material as having no need whatsoever to appeal to the colonial

regime to either mediate or implement his reforms, especially his economic reforms.

The economic crisis outlined in Nehemiah 5 could not have been more disastrous for the Golah community. The ruling elite had exploited the lower class to such an extent that the lower class Jews were forced to sell their sons and daughters into slavery so as to pay their debts to their fellow Jewish comrades (upper class Jews). Nehemiah is portrayed as extremely sympathetic to the cries and pain of the exploited masses - a cry of pain exacerbated by famine in Judah. Nehemiah boldly brings charges against the nobles and the officials for exploiting their own flesh, i.e. fellow Jews. Nehemiah's economic strategy, aimed at redressing the exploitative practices and policies of the nobles and officials, in effect the entire ruling elite, is premised on the tithing principle and economic reparation by personal example. However, it is doubtful whether these corrective were enough to reorganise, in any fundamental manner, the social stratification which produced and maintained a wealthy elite.

The location of the Nehemiah 5 narrative *vis-a-vis* the economic restructuring reads much like a redactional insertion. The point has already been made (*see* Chapter 4 above) that the economic correctives outlined in Nehemiah 5 disrupt the narrative flow - a narrative which 'chronologically' outlines the process whereby the city wall was finally completed.

In sum, the [N] literary unit can be characterised as premised upon an open-ended

imperial decree(s). The content of the decree(s)/letter(s) granted to Nehemiah is squarely in the hands of Nehemiah. The decree(s) as Williamson suggests acted like a statement of principle. As such, the [N] literary unit, unlike that of [S-Z] and [E] reflects a greater flexibility and a more profound freedom in terms of the political power undergirding it.

5.3 CONCLUSION

The above analysis has demonstrated that a key to appreciating the nuances of meaning, here defined as the politics of language, of the Aramaic words for letter, decree, official report and so forth, lay not so much in tracing the etymological rootage. Rather, as demonstrated above, it is more beneficial to try and determine the function of the words within the literary-ideological framework of the text.

The above analysis has also demonstrated that in E-N there is no consistency in the use of any of the five terms examined above. This may be due to redactional activity, or the waning use of certain Persian political and administrative terms within the Jewish context. What is important to recognise is those terms which emanate from the Persian political and administrative realm are used in a religio-cultural text and context, namely the Golah community of Jerusalem-Judah in the Second Temple period. The extent to which the initial meaning of the *loan* (Persian administrative and political) terminology is meant to carry over into the religio-cultural environment in which it was used is uncertain. For example, the crescendo of the [S-Z] literary unit is

the parallel recognition that the temple was rebuilt as a result of the decrees of God and three Persian kings. Which type of decree is more important in this context, or is this the wrong question to ask of the text?

A further important observation that emerges from the above analysis is the creative manner in which the extensive use of official political correspondence has been woven into the narrative fabric of what is essentially a religio-cultural text. The dialectical relationship between the political/imperial decrees and the religio-cultural text in which it is set is explosive. There is no doubt, on a literary level, that the religio-*cultic* context of the kind promoted by reformers such as Ezra and Nehemiah provides a profound and unique opportunity for imperial ideology to acquire religious legitimacy. Similarly, the imperial decrees imbues the religio-cultural discourse with an aura of 'officialdom' and imperial sanction, a type of proverbial colonial nod of approval. It is unlikely that the Persian authorities promulgated the imperial decrees with such a hope and intention in mind. Could the same be said for the intentions of the compilers of the E-N text? A literary-ideological analysis must always remain suspicious of the kind textual unity of what might be considered to be an unholy alliance. This kind of collaboration on a textual level signifies a similar ideological collaboration on a material level. An awareness of the ideological collusion of the E-N text with the political discursive practices of a colonial regime emerges as a crucial observation which emerges when texts are read in the context of the politics, power and ideology which surrounds it.

CHAPTER 6

DECODING THE CONFLICT DISCOURSE IN EZRA-NEHEMIAH

This chapter aims to make clear the conflict discourse inherent in E-N, intending, thereby, to demonstrate the centrality of the imperial decrees in resolving the conflict.

The discourse of conflict in E-N takes place both explicitly and implicitly. The explicit mode is found in the narrative complex of Ezra 1-6 and concentrated in Ezra 4-6, the conflict over which of the Jewish groups legitimately qualify to rebuild the temple. The conflict discourse, here, reflects linguistic and stylistic features and techniques which include, for example, a range of sub-texts, double-silences and literary-ideological reversals.

The implicit mode of conflict discourse is found, particularly, in the narratives which outline the missions of Ezra and Nehemiah. Both the implicit and the explicit modes of discourse signify the nature of the struggle for control of Jerusalem-Judah in terms of literary and ideological warfare.

6.1 EXPLICIT CONFLICT DISCOURSE: EZRA 4-6

The explicit opposition in Ezra 4-6 is of two kinds, internal psychological warfare and external political-ideological warfare.

Internal Affairs-Psychological warfare: Internal psychological warfare is openly recorded in Ezra 4:1-5. The verses contrast the group of Jews who claim cultic-ideological continuity, legitimacy and ownership to Jewish identity and heritage, with those who had returned from Babylonian exile and who make similar claims. Both representative groups are Jewish exiles who, because of the circumstances of history, do not share the same existential colonial heritage. One group identifies itself in terms of the Assyrian experience of colonisation while the other does so in terms of Babylonian deportation and banishment. The Assyrian-aligned exiles are portrayed negatively, as *adversaries of Judah and Benjamin* [צרי יהודה ובנימן] (Ez 4:1). Particularly interesting, here, is the inclusion of Benjamin as a legitimate member of the Golah (*see also* Ez 1:5; 10:9). The inhabitants of Benjamin are considered not to have suffered political banishment as did the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Evans 1992:672). If this is so, the inclusion of Benjamin is, therefore, justified not on an experiential or genealogical level but on a purely ideological level. This might also account for the repetitive usage of the phrase "Judah and Benjamin" in 2 Chronicles *(see especially* 2 Chron 32:32, in the context of Josiah's reform to "all who were present in Jerusalem and in Benjamin").

The claims made by the repatriated Assyrian exiles and the counter-claims of the repatriated Babylonian exiles are unambiguous and powerful, and reflect clearly the ideological trajectories from which each of the groups develops its ideas of the content of a legitimate Jewish identity. (*See the following comparative chart*).

THE LOCUS OF JEWISH IDENTITY: Colonial Trajectories

ASSYRIAN EXILES צרי יהודה ובנימן - **adversaries of Judah and Benjamin (Ez 4:1)**	BABYLONIAN EXILES בני הגולה - **sons of the Golah (Ez 4:1)**
Let us build with you, for we worship your God as you do and we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of **King Esar-haddon of Assyria** who brought us here (Ez 4:2).	You shall have no part with us in building a house to our God; but we alone will build to the Lord, the God of Israel, as **King Cyrus of Persia** has commanded (Ez 4:3)

The above comparison clearly illustrates the power assumptions of the Golah as they claim exclusive rights to determine the content and character of Jewish heritage. The conflict of the repatriated Assyrian exiles with the repatriated Babylonian exiles, subsequently develops into full-blown *psychological warfare* - a battle for hearts and minds over the hallmarks of Jewish identity. The strategies employed by the Assyrian exiles included fear tactics and the bribery of officials in order to frustrate the rebuilding programme (Ez 4:4b-5). The E-N text unambiguously considers Babylonian banishment to be the *exclusive* and *definitive* factor in the determination of who is to participate in the rebuilding programme. However, the resilience of the Assyrian exiles is not underestimated, as indicated in vv.4-5:

> Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build and they bribed officials to frustrate their plan throughout the reign of King Cyrus of Persia and until the reign of King Darius of Persia.

The conflict between the people of the land [עם־הארץ], also called adversaries of Benjamin and Judah [צרי יהודה ובנימן], on the one hand, and the people of

Judah [עם־יהודה], also called sons of the Golah [בני הגולה], on the other hand *(viz.*, Ez 4:1-5), is an intra-Jewish conflict to determine legitimate right to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem. The battle lines are clearly drawn between those who can demonstrate Babylonian-Persian colonial experience and those who can claim Assyrian colonial experience. The following comparative table indicates the lines of identity between the competing factions. (*Also, see Chapter 4, above, for a more detailed listing of the socio-ethnic terminology distinguishing competing factions within the province Beyond the River.*)

SOCIO-ETHNIC CONFLICT: Competing Factions

בני הגולה (sons of the Golah) defined as residents of יהודה ובנימן (Judah & Benjamin) (v.1)	*against*	צרי יהודה ובנימן (adversaries of Judah and Benjamin) (v.1)
Persian colonial experience (v.3)	*against*	Assyrian colonial experience (v.2)
עם־יהודה (people of Judah) (v.4)	*against*	עם־הארץ (people of the land) (v.4)

External Affairs-Political and Ideological warfare: The explicit mode of conflict discourse in Ezra 4-6 is characterised by four *official* documents/reports of complaint emanating from the עם־הארץ and directed to the Persian court (Ez 4:6,7,8f; 5:6f). Of these four documents, the E-N text provides descriptive detail for only two, i.e. Ezra 4:8f; 5:6f. The documents reveal that the conflict between עם־הארץ and עם־יהודה

is now being fought on a different and more intense level, namely a *structural-political-ideological* level. By definition, this is an *external* method of struggle which takes the form of literary exchanges between the provincial leaders, i.e. the local ruling elite, and the Persian king. The aim of the local ruling elite, representing the people of the land, is to solicit conclusively the political, ideological and military support of the Persian colonial power in order to either completely thwart the reconstruction and development plans of the עם־יהודה or to ensure that עם־הארץ be included as a legitimate part of Jewish society during the Second Temple period.

It must be noted at this early stage of our analysis, that on the inner-Jewish level of conflict, the עם־הארץ includes a Jewish group who wants to be considered to be part of Jewish identity in the period. On the structural-political-ideological level, the Jewish group is lumped together with *non-Jews* to make up the collective adversarial category called עם־הארץ. Jewish identity is now strictly confined to the *Golah* in Jerusalem-Judah, including Benjaminites, while the opposition now comprises both *non*-Golah Jews and Persian officials, collectively called עם־הארץ.

Document mentioned in Ezra 4:6: The first explicit sign of literary-ideological warfare is the *written accusation against the residents of Judah and Jerusalem* written during the reign of King Ahasuerus.

וּבְמַלְכוּת אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ בִּתְחִלַּת מַלְכוּתוֹ כָּתְבוּ
שִׂטְנָה עַל־יֹשְׁבֵי יְהוּדָה וִירוּשָׁלִָם׃ (Ez 4:6)

Translation: *And during the reign of Ahasuerus - in the year of his succession - they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.*

The specific identity of the opposition forces remains as concealed as the content of the document itself. It seems that the mere knowledge of the fact that a letter of complaint had been sent to Persia is sufficient. In terms of literary style and presentation, mention of the letter functions to introduce a change of warfare strategy, from internal political pressure, i.e. psychological warfare, to a strategy of *external* political-ideological pressure. It is the mode of conflict which is about to be made explicit in subsequent documents filed with the Persian court.

Document mentioned in Ezra 4:7: The next document of opposition mentioned [הנשתון] is similar to the previous in that its content is not revealed. However, the names of the representatives of the forces of opposition are, in fact, mentioned. They are Bishlam, Mithredath, and Tabeel, along with the rest of their associates. The king receiving the complaint is named as Artaxerxes.

וּבִימֵי אַרְתַּחְשַׁשְׂתָּא כָּתַב בִּשְׁלָם מִתְרְדָת
טַבְאֵל וּשְׁאָר כְּנָוָתוֹ עַל־אַרְתַּחְשַׁשְׂתָּא
מֶלֶךְ פָּרַס וּכְתָב הַנִּשְׁתָּוָן כְּתוּב אֲרָמִית וּמְתֻרְגָּם אֲרָמִית׃ **(Ez 4:7)**

Translation: *And in the days of Artaxerxes, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel and the rest of his associates wrote to Artaxerxes, king of Persia. And writing [language!] of the official document was Aramaic [Aramaic script?] but translated [from] *Aramaic.*

Note: **Aramaic: cf.Dan 2:4 - this is probably a scribal note to warn the reader that what follows (Ez 4:8-6:18) is in Aramaic (Williamson 1985:54).*

One additional element introduced at this point in the narrative is the use of Aramaic as the language of the document [הנשתון]. Some ambiguity is created in that the text

states that the letter, which is written in Aramaic, is translated and then read to King Artaxerxes. While some feel that the document might have been in Hebrew but written in Aramaic script, therefore in need of translation, others feel that what is indicated is that the letter is in the Aramaic language *(see* Williamson 1985:61). We are confronted with the puzzle of the Persian court, whose political language is Aramaic, needing to translate a letter which is already in Aramaic. We must note the gloss in Ezra 4:18 which states that the document is, indeed, read in translation. Could it be that the word 'Aramaic' is a redactional addition, or do we, in fact, have a reference to a document written in Aramaic script which needed translation?

What is clear is that the second document of opposition carries with it more authority and power than the first. The document identifies as its supporters Bishlam, possibly the Persian consul at Samaria, and Tabeel, the chief Samaritan representative of the people (Myers 1965:37). As in the case of the first document, all that is known is the fact that a document has been sent to the Persian king. It seems then that the knowledge that a document has been sent, backed by an increase in political authority, status and power, functions to indicate the growing level of official frustration and opposition to the rebuilding plans of the returnees.

Documents mentioned in Ezra 4:8 & 9: A third document [אגרה] of opposition is written and delivered to the Persian headquarters. The description of the document includes details concerning the language in which the document is written (i.e.,

Aramaic), the names of the opposition and, most important, the content of the document. Ezra 4:8 identifies the opposition as being embodied in and signified by Rehum, the commanding officer/royal deputy and Shimshai, the scribe. However, in what must certainly be a later redactional addition, the next verse (v.9) expands the size of the opposition considerably, as the following chart illustrates.

EZRA 4:9b-10: A REDACTIONAL EXPANSION

Ez 4:8	**Ez 4:9-11**
Rehum the royal deputy and Shimshai the scribe	v.9...Then, Rehum, the royal deputy, Shimshai the scribe,
	and the rest of the associates, the judges, the envoys, the officials, the Persians, the people of Erech, the Babylonians, the people of Susa (Elamites), [v.10] and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Osnappar deported and settled in the cities of Samaria and in the rest of the province Beyond the River
wrote a **letter** [אגרה] against Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes as follows	wrote - and now, [v.11] this is a copy of the **letter** [אגרתא] they sent

Verses 9-11 show a greatly increased and expanded force opposing the rebuilding programme of the Golah. We see a formidable number of people considered to be in direct opposition to the building programme of the returnees. The technique of hyperbolic contrasts is a very clear literary-ideological technique used to expand the appearance of the opposition beyond עם־הארץ, who must have seemed an insignificant group, in contrast. It is clear that the opposition to the returnees wants the Persian king to know that *everybody* is against the building program of the returnees.

There occurs a clear inflation in the number of the voices of opposition within the space of three verses and three documents - from the first document where the opposition is not identified to the third document which exaggerates the number of people and nations poised against the returnees and their building programme.

The aim and content of the third document of opposition is to inform King Artaxerxes about the seditious and dangerous heritage of the Jews. The document [אגרה] stereotypes and characterises the Jews, who have come up from exile to Jerusalem, in terms of their radical prophetic heritage. The opposition (Rehum and company) wants King Artaxerxes to interpret the prophetic heritage of the Jews in negative and destructive terms. The ideological agenda of the opposition is to instil fear in the heart of the imperial ruler.

The style of opposition, here, does have a resemblance to the psychological warfare signified in Ezra 4:4. However, the difference lies in a clear shift in focus from an attempt, on the part of the local opposition, at instilling fear in the hearts of the local Jews in Judah, to an attempt at instilling fear in the heart of the imperial ruler. The nature of opposition (intimidation, misrepresentation) may be considered the same, but the form is radically different. The opposition pitches the battle on a structural-political-ideological level.

The document of opposition does not reflect any attempt, on the part of the

opposition, to make concrete proposals to the King in terms of recommending any explicit form of action to be taken against the returnees. They seem not to want to be interpreted as dictating to the king what action would be appropriate on his part. Rather, their primary task is that of *objectively* informing the king of events taking place in his kingdom. The document of opposition here then presents itself as a document to be interpreted as an attempt at merely *reporting the facts*!

The *economic-threat* motif of the document is fairly straightforward. King Artaxerxes is warned that if he allows the returnees to rebuild Jerusalem, Persia will not receive the taxes and custom which rightfully should come to the royal treasury (Ez 4:13). The strategy of the opposition is abundantly clear. Their task and objective is to prove to the king that his royal status is being threatened by a clientele who have a clear history of refusing to pay taxes to their rulers. The document, then, is aimed at proving to King Artaxerxes that his economic and political status is being undermined by the ongoing reconstruction programme of the returnees. In addition, the added dimension of *political shame/dishonour* which comes as a natural consequence of the non-payment of custom, toll and royal revenue is introduced. As far as the opposition is concerned, dishonour/shame [ערות] would be brought upon the King (Ez 4:14) if this group of Babylonian exiles were to refuse to pay royal tribute and imperial taxes of various kinds. In a political economy where the mode of production is tributary, the non-payment of tribute is most certainly the way to undermine the status of the ruling power. The opposition indicated its concern that the returnees would bring shame and

disgrace upon the royal crown if they were allowed to continue their reconstruction and development programme, i.e. the rebuilding of the second temple. The loyalty of the opposition in concern for the well-being of the King is but a pretext and a means to an end.

The ultimate purpose of the opposition is clearly manifested in the official Persian response to the document of opposition. The official imperial response to the threat of guaranteed shame and dishonour is a foregone conclusion. King Artaxerxes issues a decree [טעם] which brings an immediate halt to the reconstruction and development programme of the returnees (Ez 4:21).

Document mentioned in Ez 5:6: The fourth document of opposition recorded in the Ez 4-6 narrative complex is written during the reign of King Darius. This document is described with three different names [טעמא = 5:5; אגרתא = 5:6; פתגמא =5:7].

In trying to account for the underlying purpose of the document, Myers (1965:44) makes a structural political observation. He notes that by late November, 521 B.C.E., Persia had finally quelled the Babylonians in the Babylonian Revolt. Early in the next year, as a result of the geo-political restructuring of Darius, Ushanti is newly-appointed as satrap of Babylon and Across the River. It is reported in the E-N text, that Ushanti's assistant, Tattenai, visits Jerusalem-Judah (Ez 5:3). Ushanti, of course, is not mentioned in the Bible, nor the fact that Tattenai is his assistant. Tattenai is

described in Ezra 5:3 as תתני פחת עבר־נהרה, [the governor of the province Beyond the River].

While the motivation for Tattenai's visit to Jerusalem is not made explicit in the narrative, Myers (1965:44) is of the opinion that the "imperial authorities were concerned about the apparent hesitation of the Jews to declare themselves openly for the new Persian regime under Darius and took steps to clarify the situation". This, argues Myers, is the reason that Tattenai, his secretary Shethar-bozenia, and representatives from Samaria come to investigate the region Judah-Jerusalem.

While Myers' theory may be plausible, a further and more supportable arena of speculation as to the reason for the official visit of Tattenai to the region might be related to the *illegality* of the temple-building programme. It must be remembered that King Artaxerxes had earlier made a decree that put a stop to the building programme of the Jews (Ez 4:21-22). Nowhere in E-N is it reflected that Tattenai was aware of the decree of Artaxerxes. In fact, the Jews themselves avoid mentioning what might accurately be called the *prohibition decree* of King Artaxerxes. The returnees choose, rather, to justify their rebuilding enthusiasm with reference to the *repatriation decree* of King Cyrus. In the course of his investigation, Tattenai himself reflects explicit knowledge of neither the prohibition decree of Artaxerxes nor of the repatriation decree of King Cyrus. There seems to be a *double-memory blank* or a *double-silence* at this point in the narrative. The silence of the text serves only to heighten the

narrative tension. It is almost unbelievable that the Persian authorities, personified by Tattenai, display absolutely no awareness of the decree of Cyrus, which was the *Magna Carta* of Persia. Even more interesting is that the spokespersons for the Jews in Jerusalem, namely the elders (Ez 5:9), choose to be silent concerning the prohibition decree of King Artaxerxes - the decree which effectively brings the temple building programme to a halt (*see* Ez 4:21-22). Both *memory-lapses/double-silences* in the text are strategically located. Here, a new dimension is introduced into the text, the subversive and, yet, motivational help from Haggai and Zechariah, the prophets of God, motivational help which in effect amounts to an explicit act of treason, *viz.* the rebuilding of the temple.

The tension created by the double silence of the narrative, amidst the loudness of the enthusiasm and motivational support from the prophets, is resolved by the imperial decree of Darius (Ez 6:6f). The decree votes in favour of the returnees and their reconstruction programme and against the implicit opposition signified by Tattenai's *fact-finding* mission. There is no doubt that prior to the proclamation of King Darius, the narrative technique is one of high tension premised on the development of a *doubt* motif. The reader is left guessing about the direction of the story's conclusion: for or against the Golah Jews. The narrative structure indicates that the narrative could easily conclude either way: i.e. in favour of the returnees or quite possibly in favour of the local ruling elite. The implicit question created by the narrative is whether or not the Jews would be allowed to continue to rebuild their temple if the Persian court were to

discover that the Jews had deliberately disobeyed earlier imperial decrees of Persia. On the other hand, there is uncertainty as to whether or not the prohibition decree of Artaxerxes would be found instead of the decree of Cyrus. If the decree of Artaxerxes were found, the worst fears of the Jews would be fulfilled, i.e. the reconstruction programme could be brought to a halt again, possibly forever. The description of the returnees as seditious and as having the potential of bringing harm to kings would have been verified (re: the letter from Rehum and company to King Artaxerxes in Ez 4:11-16). There exists a real possibility that the Persian authorities will uncover first-hand evidence as to the treasonable character of the prophetic heritage of the Jews.

The *double-silence* motif of the text can be stated as a silence on two levels: first, the understandable *silence of the Jews* as to any knowledge concerning the prohibition decree of Artaxerxes and second, *the silence/ignorance of Tattenai* concerning the existence of the decree of Cyrus, as well as that of Artaxerxes.

We can only speculate upon the precise reasons for the visit of Tattenai. However, the above commentary concerning the double-silence motif suggests that the primary issue that needs to be resolved, although not explicitly stated, as such, is the *legality* of the rebuilding programme of the Jews. A close reading of Tattenai's official report suggests that to be the primary issue at stake. The question raised by Tattenai, while strange, is nevertheless important. He asks who has given the returnees a decree [טעם] to build the house of God and to finish its structure. He also wanted to know

the names of the men who are actively doing the building (Ez 5:3-4). In his letter to King Darius, which is, in fact, more like an official report (*see* Ez 5:7-17), Tattenai quotes the returnees extensively (vv.11-16). The spokespersons for the returnees, namely the elders of the Jews [שׂבי יהודיא, v.5; cf. v.9 which refers only to שבי - "elders"], provide Tattenai with a theological rationale for their colonial domination by Babylon (v.12). At the same time they tell Tattenai that King Cyrus of Persia had originally permitted them, by a decree [טעם], to build the house of God (v.13). It is obviously not in the interests of the returnees to make any mention of the decree of Artaxerxes which had earlier brought their reconstruction programme to an abrupt halt and which, technically, is still a binding imperial document for the Jews in Jerusalem.

There is a move on the part of the compilers, it seems, to deliberately down-play the political and economic implications of the enthusiasm of the returnees *vis-a-vis* rebuilding the temple. There is no doubt that any serious search of the Persian archives would have proved the vigourous building programme of the returnees, at this time of Tattenai's governorship, to be in flagrant violation of the imperial decree of Artaxerxes, or, in effect, an act of high treason. The rebuilding programme, now, is more than an act of mere civil disobedience. The returnees have absolutely no legal or political right to rebuild the temple. The decree of Artaxerxes (Ez 4:21) has clearly and explicitly forbidden such activity, indefinitely. As already mentioned, the silence of the E-N text on the issue is rather striking. Such silence can, therefore, legitimately be interpreted as a textual strategy in order to muzzle the text so as not to offend the

political sensibilities of a pro-Persian Jewish readership. On a textual level this is clearly a moment of revisionist history. The E-N text reflects an attempt at re-reading, in a positive light, what is clearly a Jewish moment of anti-Persian ideology and hegemony. There is an attempt in E-N to re-read the treasonable action of the Jews in as positive a light as possible. The compilers of E-N, it seems, do not want to have it on record that the Jews have disobeyed the imperial decrees of the Persian court. The reinterpretation has its focus in the help and motivation of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, as they provide the Jews with a fresh sense of enthusiasm to complete the temple building, albeit an *illegal and treasonable* activity.

Tattenai obviously does not believe the *official* Jerusalem response to his fact-finding mission. He consequently writes to King Darius for verification of the mandate provided by the imperial decree of king Cyrus. Tattenai requests that King Darius make a decree [טעם] to have the archives searched for verification of the legitimacy of the reconstruction and development plan of the returnees, which King Darius does (Ez 6:1).

The conclusion to the tension created by the double-silence in the Tattenai-Jerusalem Jews drama is, of course, the imperial decree of Darius. The decree of King Darius reaffirms the legitimacy of the building programme of the returnees as initially mandated by the imperial decree of King Cyrus. And, as if to add insult to injury, King Darius commands, by formal decree, that governor Tattenai and company ensure

that the building programme of the Jews continue to completion without delay and with Persian financial support.

6.2 EXPLICIT CONFLICT - A LITERARY-IDEOLOGICAL COMPARISON

A comparison of the documents of conflict emanating from Rehum and associates with that of Tattenai and his associates reflects a very different style and approach. The ideological agenda of Rehum and company is that of vicious and vindictive indictments against the Jews. The indictments are not completely incorrect. The prophetic heritage of the Jews certainly does demand that any imperial power have a healthy respect for its deconstructive potential. However, it is clear that the radical heritage of the Jews is being co-opted by a ruling elite in Jerusalem.

Relocating the socio-economic centre: The concern of Tattenai seems to be confined to the diligence with which the people are building the house of God and the fact that the returnees are fast getting the job done. There is, in the document, no explicit castigation of the Jews in Jerusalem or even any mention of the economic aspects and concerns raised earlier by Rehum and company. So, on one level, we can say that Tattenai's inquiry is innocent, not intended to have any vindictive motives. However, if we take seriously the real possibility that a rebuilt temple would mean that the revenues of the temple (taxes, etc.) would now be relocated in the province of Judah and not in the administrative capital, Samaria, then we can understand the

concern of Tattenai. The text is not explicit enough on the matter, and, therefore, our conclusions must remain speculative. However, it might not be overstating matters to argue that Tattenai's fact-finding mission reflects a fear on the part of the Samaritan-based ruling elite that the political and economic status of Samaria as the *official* capital for Jerusalem-Judah is being severely threatened by the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, to the south. Further evidence to support the theory can be extracted from the fine analysis of Blenkinsopp (1991b) [for a summary of Blenkinsopp's analysis see, above, pp.125-127 - *Excursus: Temple Ideology*] concerning the role of temples in the Persian period and the potential ideological significance of a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. In addition, one must not forget the significance of the content of the opposition from Rehum and company. It does seem plausible, then, to argue that, at the core of Tattenai's concern *vis-a-vis* the diligence of the people rebuilding the temple, is an economic issue, the fear of the lessening of, if not complete loss of, status and respect for the Persian crown and of a secession of Jerusalem-Judah from Samaria. Regarding the *secession* theory, it is interesting that Tattenai's letter presupposes that Judah is already a province, presumably an independent area (Ez 5:3), which might explain the cautious tone of his report. The political status of Judah at the time is a matter of scholarly debate. What is certain, as deduced from a comparison of the different tones of the documents of opposition, is that during Rehum's time, Judah is still administratively controlled from the north, by Samaria. Thus the change in tone and approach, as indicated by Tattenai, might be indicative of a structural shift and change, that of Judah becoming an independent

area. The paucity of data forces the issue of the status of Judah to remain an open-ended question. In addition, it needs to be mentioned that the historical concerns of the text must take a secondary position to the ideological concerns. The primary literary-ideological concern of the E-N narrative at this juncture is to make explicit the structural-political-ideological nature of the struggle between עם־יהודה and עם־הארץ.

Jerusalem-Jews as silent and passive: A most significant literary-ideological feature of Ezra 4-6, is the striking absence of any document(s) emerging from the *accused* returnees to the Persian crown. The returnees nowhere attempt to refute the allegations made against them by the various opposition groups. In fact, as vigorous, active and pointed as the accusations against them are, so are the returnees passive and silent. The accused returnees are depicted as accepting the criticism, the character assassination and the ideological abuse of the opposition. Consequently, all the documented correspondence in the narratives of opposition are written communications between the local ruling elite of the province Beyond the River and the Persian court.

The portrayal of the returnees as silent and passive objects in the narratives of ideological warfare (*see also* Gottwald 1992b) highlights the miraculous nature of the outcome. The conclusion of the narrative is the vindication of the returnees. The success of the returnees is portrayed and predicated on what are here called literary-

ideological reversals, which are clearly demonstrable through a literary-ideological analysis. In short, the battle which rages as to the legality or illegality is resolved without the returnees having to raise one single word in defense, other than, in passing, mentioning the decree of Cyrus as the reason for the building programme (*see* Ez 5:13).

It would not be incorrect to describe the conflict in Ezra 1-6, especially in Ezra 4-6, as being literary-ideological warfare, but without the active participation of the returnees. Mallau (1998:80) rightly observes that the overall redactor opts for an apparently scholarly approach to history, which, in effect, presupposes that only that which is documented is historically correct. Ezra 4-6, as we see, is compacted with documents (including letters, decrees, accusations), all of which have political significance. However, the significance of the outcome of the conflict is more clearly illustrated by making explicit the literary-ideological reversals in the narrative.

The foregoing analysis points out the radical contrast in numbers between the united majority front of opposition (Ez 4:9-10) and the small, seemingly fragile, nucleus of returnees.

The Persian response to the first explicitly described document of opposition (Ez 4:11-16) is, of course, the imperial decree of Artaxerxes (Ez 4:17-22). Artaxerxes is described as issuing a decree [טעם] which effectively brings the building programme

to a grinding halt. Intriguing for our analysis is the use of language and the powers delegated to the forces of opposition. King Artaxerxes grants the governing class of the Province Beyond the River the political clout whereby to forcefully stop all building (Ez 4:23). The forces of opposition proceed to carry out the imperial instruction with the use of *force and power* [בּאדרע וחיל (Ez 4:23)], presumably military force and power vested in them by the king.

The context of opposition, signified by Tattenai's official report to King Darius, is resolved not because of lobbying on the part of the Jews but, rather, in spite of the silence of the Jews. The decree of Darius, which is discussed in detail below, has far-reaching implications. In terms of the narrative structure, the Darius decree serves as an official and final irreversible decree *vis-a-vis* the building of the temple. That Tattenai is commanded to fund the work of the returnees, in his capacity as governor (Ez 6:8f), does seem to confirm that the motive that lies behind the inquiry of Tattenai is to ensure that Samaria remains the sole political and economic administrator for the province. Tattenai, as governor of the province, recognizes that the construction of a house of God effectively means that his tax-base is to be diminished drastically, if not completely, given that Jerusalem is historically the ideological center of Jewish identity. In other words, as is argued above, the shift in tone and approach of Tattenai *vis-a-vis* the legitimacy of the returnees' right to build the temple should not distract the exegete from recognising the political-economic fears and anxieties of a politically and economically shrewd governor.

On the other hand, accepting the arguments of Blenkinsopp in regard to the importance of temples, the Jewish leaders who are facilitating the construction of a temple, and in fact, the reconstruction of a new nation in a post-Babylonian era, are fully aware of the economic and political potential of a fully-functioning temple cult. In essence, it means to govern autonomously, free from the constraints and control of Samaria, and possibly, more broadly speaking, free from Persian hegemony. It is no wonder that reformers like Ezra and Nehemiah feverishly secure the centrality and historic importance of Jerusalem as the religio-cultural center of Jewish life during the Persian period. Indeed, the fears of Rehum and Tattenai are well founded. A fully-functioning Jerusalem can only imply the shift of political and economic power from the north to the south of Israel.

Structural-ideological reversals: It can be argued, legitimately, that Darius' vote in favour of the returnees, and against the Persian-sanctioned governors like Tattenai, is a reflection of a colonial administration desperate to secure its control of the region, even if it means the geo-political relocation of the ideological nerve centre of the region. Persia's political and strategic interests include the compromising of the power base of Samaria in favour of Jerusalem's becoming the new religio-cultural and economic center of the entire province Beyond the River. King Darius, we must remember, does ask specifically that the Judean-Jerusalem-centered Jewish community remember him and his family in their prayers:

[ומצלין לחיי מלכא ובנוהי] (Ez 6:10)

The elements of reversal at this point are thus confined to the realm of potential structural-political rearrangements. At the very least, Persia's decision in favour of the returnees is a radical reversal of the Persian-based policy of maintaining Persian-sanctioned leaders such as Rehum and Tattenai. The requests of the Samaritan ruling elite are reversed to the extent that the place of power occupied by the opposition to the building programme is radically undermined. The returnees are allowed to rebuild the temple, which, by implication, means a shift in the nature and balance of power for the region called the Province Beyond the River. This shift is nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in the mission of Ezra and Nehemiah. The point here is that a literary-ideological reading of the text signifies a dramatic structural reversal in terms of which leaders and regions benefit from Persian ideological support.

Linguistic reversals: Another element of reversal appears when the measures Darius commands the opposition to carry out in favour of the Temple builders is signified by the word - אסְפַרְנָא - [with all diligence, throroughly, perfectly, correctly, exactly, perfectly - *see* BDB 1082] (Ez 5:8; 6:8,13; 7:17,21,26). In fact, there is here an element of ridicule on the part of the compilers. Tattenai reports to King Darius that the returnees are extremely motivated, diligent and exact *vis-a-vis* their building of the house of God. In fact, the work is prospering in their hands (Ez 5:8).

The compilers then cast the conclusive and official response of King Darius using the same linguistic point of reference, but with just the opposite ideological effect and

result. The opposition is instructed to support the returnees economically and politically. What is more, the support must be characterised by perfection [אסְפַרְנָא] (Ez 6:8,12). If ever there were a situation of irony this would certainly be one. The same perfection which the Jews displayed in building the temple must now characterise the nature of the support which the opposition must provide for the returnees.

Reversal vis-a-vis sponsorhip of the cult: The Ezra mission also reflects the theme of ideological reversal. Although the Ezra narrative structure is analysed below, it may be instructive here to make some preliminary observations. The mandate which Ezra receives from Artaxerxes (Ez 7:11-26) is void of the kind of literary-ideological warfare contained in the opposition narratives of Ezra 4-6. Nevertheless, there is a continuation of the play on the word - אסְפַרְנָא. As in Ez 4-6 the context is one of Persian support for the reinforcement of the legitimacy of the shifting of the religio-cultural center from Samaria to Judah-Jerusalem. King Artaxerxes issues a decree [הִנְּשְׁתְּוָן] (Ez 7:11f) in which Persian support for the Jerusalem-based Golah community is cemented. Ezra is told that, with the economic support which King Artaxerxes is providing, he must ensure that all parts of the sacrificial rituals (bulls, rams, lambs, grain offerings, drink offerings - in other words, everything that is going to be offered on the altar) be purchased with perfection/precision [אסְפַרְנָא] with the money provided by the royal treasury (Ez 7:17). While the Ezra narrative does not contain the same kind and level of opposition as does Ezra 4-6, the play on words is

nevertheless emphatic. The same perfection which characterises both the industry of the returnees and the forced support of the opposition is now to characterise the nature of Persian support for the reconstruction programme of the Jews in Judah-Jerusalem.

Judicial reversals: Further literary-ideological reversals are evident when contrasting the consequences of the failure to comply with the imperial decrees of Persia. Ezra is given the authority to perfectly (with precision) [אסְפַרְנָא] execute anyone who does not obey the wishes of the king. No doubt, the wish of the king is that the community of returnees, under the leadership of Ezra, succeed in establishing Judah-Jerusalem as the new religio-cultural center for the Province Beyond the River. The political gain for Persia in terms of a stable Judah-Jerusalem region is enormous, especially given the frequent uprisings in rebellious Egypt.

In sum, there is no doubt that the returnees eventually gain favour with Persia and are able to reassert a form of preexilic-type Jewish hegemony in the Judah-Jerusalem district. Indeed, it is argued, above, that the ideological implications of, and the benefits of, Persian support for a Jerusalem-centered province Beyond the River are signified by the text itself. While not explicitly stated in the literature and, perhaps not obvious on the surface of the text, the kind of literary-ideological analysis displayed above enables the exegete to argue persuasively that Persian ideological interests are clearly manifest in the decrees. In fact, the decrees are quoted in the Jewish literature, not merely as a means of factual information, but as a *theological* or *ideological*

statement of support on the part of the returnees for the political, economic and strategic interests of Persia. The narrow focus of the returnees' pro-Persian stance is directly related to their need and ability to rebuild the temple. The broader ideological issue, certainly from a Persian point of view, could well be Persia's desire to maintain a strong, unfragmented region, even if it means relocating the ideological nerve center of the province Beyond the River from the North (Samaria) to the South (Jerusalem). In so doing, Persia, on an ideological level, obviously reinforces the hegemony of a rather fragile Golah community, and with the use of decrees, makes it possible for the minority to survive and rule the region.

The extent to which the literature communicates the ideological agendas is clearly demonstrated in the use of the technique of literary-ideological reversals. The same words used in different contexts have exactly the opposite ideological force and impact.

While the above analysis of the discourse of conflict is confined to Ezra 4-6, it does attempt to move the literary discussion concerning the imperial decrees *beyond* the descriptive form-critical categories to an approach which tries to interpret the forms of communication (i.e., letters, decrees, reports) in terms of their literary-ideological significance. It is noted that the compilers of the E-N, in pointing to their source documents, seem to want to communicate more than the issue of literary classification. The primary issue for the compilers, it seems, is an ideological one. At

the most basic and fundamental ideological level, the point being made by the compilers is that the decrees of King Cyrus, Artaxerxes and Darius are to be seen as having the same legitimacy and the same power as that of a decree of God. It is noted that the same semantic and linguistic range used for decrees of God is used for those of the Persian kings.

It is, therefore, abundantly clear that the discourse of conflict signifies the central role played by the imperial decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes in terms of resolving the inherent conflict between the people of the land and the people of Judah.

6.3 IMPLICIT CONFLICT DISCOURSE

The absense of an explicit conflict motif in Ezra 7-10: If the conflict motif in Ezra 4-6 is striking by its vocal presence and explicitness, then the opposition motif in Ezra 7-10 is striking because of its absence. The broad outline of the narrative content and structure of Ezra 7-10 is rather straightforward. Ezra returns to Jerusalem-Judah with a decree and mandate from the King of Persia. Much to his dismay, Ezra discovers that the *holy seed* [זרע הקדש] has mixed itself with the *peoples of the land* [עמי הארצות] (Ez 9:2). After some prayer, confession and weeping (Ez 10:1), Ezra legislates the dual *separation* of the זרע הקדש from the impure *peoples of the land* [עמי הארץ] through the divorce of women who fill the criteria of being classified as *foreign wives* [נשים נכריות] (Ez 10:11). The Ezra 7-10 narrative concludes with a list of those who are identified as **not** belonging to the pure and newly-defined nation

of Israel (Ez 10:18f). In other words, the identity of the Jews in Jerusalem-Judah is defined in terms of those who were excluded, namely the *foreigners* among whom are to be found Jews as well. The high point of the narrative, or, put differently, the celebratory context of the Ez 7-10 narrative complex, is that of being able to identify *in writing* (i.e. by means of genealogical records) those who do **not** belong to the newly-defined people of Israel. Thus, on a literary level it can be classified as a *negative celebratory moment* - the moment of confirmed exclusivism.

The key to understanding the reason for the striking absence of opposition in Ezra 7-10 lies in the broad-ranging powers which are vested in Ezra prior to his departure from the colonial headquarters. The context of Ezra 1-6 arises from a fluid and uncertain phase of Jewish settlement in Jerusalem-Judah. The narrative structure of the narrative concerning the Ezra mission in Ezra 7-10 reflects an awareness of the need to clearly define the parameters of political, economic and religious power. In addition, the parameters need to be settled before the arrival of Ezra and his entourage in Jerusalem. The first section, namely Ezra 1-6, is certainly premised on the support of an imperial decree of Persia. Ezra 7-10 is similarly premised. However, it takes just about six chapters before the parameters of the political power and privilege of initial returnees are finally settled in Ezra 1-6. The Ezra 7-10 narrative, in contrast, eliminates the need for as many as six chapters to establish the prevailing powers of Ezra. The explicit parameters of Persian support for the Jews in Judah-Jerusalem, via Ezra, are negotiated and settled before Ezra's departure from the Persian court.

In sum, what had taken the initial returnees six chapters to accomplish, Ezra, the reformer, accomplishes before his arrival in Jerusalem. As already mentioned, the broad-ranging powers vested in Ezra by King Artaxerxes are not to be taken lightly. The powers, by definition, prohibit any form of resistance and opposition. No amount of letters or reports from any opposition force would be able to topple the power-base of the Ezra mission. The imperial decree of Artaxerxes clearly outlines Ezra's unique power, in a way comparable to the stipulations of the decree of Darius (Ez 6:11-12):

> All who will not obey the law of your God and the law of the King, let judgment be strictly executed on them, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of their goods or for imprisonment (Ez 7:26 cf.Ez 10:8).

The elaborate opposition narratives of Ezra 1-6 seem to have been stylised and, in a sense, distanced from the narrative framework of Ezra 7-10 through the genius of the written word. The decree of Artaxerxes which undergirds the mission of Ezra is constructed and presented to such an extent that it subsumes all levels of opposition.

The E-N text does not enable the exegete to make adequate conclusions as to the motivations for the Ezra mission. Hoglund (1989) attempts to do so with the help of archaeological evidence and through a re-reading of the Greek literature which provides impressions of the nature of Achaemenid administration during the period. While this study accepts the plausibility of Hoglund's hypothesis, there is a need to look more closely at the text for any clues that might confirm or disconfirm Hoglund's hypothesis.

There must certainly have been a crisis within the Persian administrative framework, making it necessary to provide Ezra with unlimited access to political and economic power. What is strange, however, is that the actions of Ezra in bringing about change in Jerusalem are not consistent with the parameters of his access to power, but are mild in proportion to the power he possesses. Before imposing laws of separation, Ezra goes through a series of ritual actions, including the tearing of his garments, fasting, pulling hair from his head (Ez 9:3f), serving to provide the *religious* dimension of the legitimation of Ezra's mission. However, Ezra's access to power and his use of the power to bring about change are never far in the background, as clearly demonstrated in the threat against the returnees who refuse to assemble in Jerusalem to discuss the intermarriage debacle. The punishment for non-participation is the confiscation of property and a banning *from the assembly/congregation of exiles* [מקהל הגולה] (Ez 10:8). This is the only time that there is an explicit use by Ezra of the political power granted by Persia. The rest of the time the compilers present Ezra as being one who does not necessarily need to lean on Persian imperial decrees to justify his power base. However, such an interpretation is short-sighted in that it does not take seriously the fact that Ezra does have at his disposal incredible political and juridical power to enforce any law that he might think appropriate.

In the above analysis of Ezra 1-6 it is noted that the decrees of the Kings of Persia (Ez 6:14) are asserted to be on a par with the decrees of God. The Ezra mission has a similar ideological orientation with the focus now centred on the דתא דיאלהך

[the law of your God] and the ודתא די מלכא [law of the king] (Ez 7:26). The mission of Ezra, as far as the decree of Artaxerxes is concerned, is to make enquiries concerning Jerusalem and Judah (Ez 7:14). Unfortunately, the exact nature of the enquiries is not made explicit, but the text does make it very clear that a failure to obey the law of God also constitutes a failure to obey the law [דתא] of the king of Persia. The failure to obey the law is thus punishable by death, banishment, confiscation of goods or imprisonment.

There is, therefore, a parallel ideological move in Ezra 7-10 to that in Ezra 1-6. The authority and power of the Persian regime is equated with the authority and power of the God of the Jews. A failure to obey the God of the Jews, the God who resides in Jerusalem, is the same as failure to obey the Persian court. As in the case of the imperial decree of Darius (especially Ez 6:8-10), the Persian court here in Ezra 7:15f makes explicit its support of the local cult by providing financial support to purchase sacrificial animals.

The decree of Artaxerxes is thus fundamental to the mission of Ezra and shows remarkable ideological similarity to that of the function of Persian decrees in Ezra 1-6. The major difference between the two blocks of literature is in the levels of opposition. While the Ezra 1-6 narrative block explicitly outlines the various stages and types of opposition, the Ezra 7-10 narratives presupposes a high level of opposition and, therefore, provides Ezra with wide-ranging powers which serve to

preempt the kind of opposition evident in Ezra 1-6.

The conflict discourse in Nehemiah 1-13: The sustained opposition to, and ridicule of, the building programme and Nehemiah's mission is identified as coming from Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite and Geshem the Arab (Neh 2:10,19; 4:1; 6:1f). Sanballat and Tobiah are described as being very disturbed by the fact that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel (Neh 2:10). Sanballot, Tobiah and, this time, Geshem as well, are described as ridiculing Nehemiah's plan to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Neh 2:17). In response to the ridicule of the opposition forces, Nehemiah is quoted as saying:

ואשיב אותם דבר ואומר להם אלהי השמים הוא
יצליח לנו ואנחנו עבדיו נקום ובנינו ולכם אין־חלק
וצדקה וזכרון בירושלם׃ (Neh 2:20)

Translation: *The God of Heaven is the one who will give us success, and we his servants are going to start building: but you have no share or claim or historic right in Jerusalem.*

The obvious question to ask is: By what authority does Nehemiah make such radical statements? What are the power assumptions in such statements as recorded in Neh 2:20? If we consider the fact that nowhere in Nehemiah do we read that the opposition forces complain to Persia concerning the rebuilding programme of Nehemiah (*contra* the opposition forces in Ez 1-6), might it not be plausible to suggest that the letters of permission which Nehemiah had secured from King Artaxerxes may have had something to do with the independence of the district of Jerusalem-Judah?

On one level, the Nehemiah narrative is not concerned with establishing the legitimacy of Nehemiah. There is a sense in which the text presupposes Nehemiah's legitimacy. What the text does do, and explicitly so, is to contrast Nehemiah and his helpful economic policies with that of previous governors who had exploited their very own people (cf.Neh 5:15f).

We need not belabour the point of the content of the decrees/letters which are given to Nehemiah by the King of Persia. In the final analysis, our speculations remain precisely that, speculations. The text simply does not provide significant data to support, conclusively, our hypothesis, although it does seem plausible. It must also be said that our hypothesis *vis-a-vis* the content of the documents issued by King Artaxerxes to Nehemiah, does not invalidate the overall hypothesis of this dissertation, that the decrees of Persia concerning the Judahites form the fundamental ideological center of the E-N literature. Even without the explicit mention of any decrees in Nehemiah, the assertion remains that, without the imperial decrees, the returning exiles, subsequently supported by the missions of Ezra and Nehemiah, would never have been successful in regaining the hegemonic control of Jerusalem-Judah which they had lost in the wake of Babylonian expansion. Indeed, the character of Judaism as practised in Jerusalem-Judah would never have been as sectarian as it developed. More poignantly, the new Jewish ruling elite (*apropo* Ezra and Nehemiah) would never have been able to replace the fairly powerful elite that had ruled Jerusalem-Judah and the entire province Beyond the River during the exilic

period if Persia had not provided the ideological framework and support for the minority of returning Babylonian exiles to reassert their power in the land that they and their ancestors had formerly ruled.

It is clear from the Nehemiah material that we are dealing with a quantitatively and qualitatively different text. Unlike the Ezra material, the Nehemiah literature provides no details of elaborate imperial decrees aimed at undergirding Nehemiah's mission. In fact, there is no explicit connection between the content of the permission granted by King Artaxerxes and the actual mission of Nehemiah. The biblical exegete is left to infer the content of the letters [אגרות (Neh 2:7-9)] of permission granted by King Artaxerxes to Nehemiah. Thus, on a quantitative level there is a radical difference between the imperial decrees in the book of Ezra and that in Nehemiah, in that no decree-document is preserved or quoted in Nehemiah.

Furthermore, there is no need for elaborate justification of Nehemiah and his programme of action. The opposition forces, unlike those in the Ezra material, do not, and, in view of my hypothesis, probably dare not confront the Persian crown *vis-a-vis* the leadership position of Nehemiah. The Ezra scenario is somewhat similar, except that Ezra is provided with genealogical as well as explicit political support from the Persian regime.

Another qualitative difference is that the Nehemiah literature makes no appeal to the

Persian court in terms of the legitimacy of Nehemiah as a ruler. Unlike Ezra, who needs a genealogical justification and an explicit endorsement of his law by the King of Persia, Nehemiah is assumed to be a legitimate governor and reformer. No other justification for his role in Jerusalem-Judah is needed than his request to the king to allow him to return to rebuild Judah (Neh 2:5). A fundamental assumption of the Nehemiah material is Nehemiah's status and power as a Persian governor (Neh 2:20). We can then argue that the redactional frame of the Nehemiah narrative is actually a foreign imposition. Thus, Nehemiah Chapter One serves to portray Nehemiah as a religious-priestly type of leader making confession on behalf of Israel (Neh 1:6 cf.5:19; 6:14; 13:14,22,29,31).

There is also a qualitative difference between the decrees in the book of Ezra and those in Nehemiah. For example, the Nehemiah narrative portrays Nehemiah as being in personal and intimate discussion with the king *vis-a-vis* the situation in Judah-Jerusalem, while the Ezra material is one stage removed from the royal court. The exclusive emphasis of the Ezra material is on the content of the written word (decrees) from the Persian court. In Nehemiah the emphasis is not on the content of the decrees but on the context out of which the decree emerges. In the final analysis, there is a decree which emerges in support of Nehemiah. The only difficulty facing the exegete is that the Nehemiah text actually provides no real detail *vis-a-vis* the imperial decree.

6.4 CONCLUSION

The above analysis has provided evidence for the presence of two levels of conflict discourse in E-N. Put differently, the resolution of conflict in E-N occurs on two levels, explicitly and implicitly. The Ezra 1-6 literary unit makes explicit a series of literary exchanges between the local ruling elite of the province Beyond the River and the Persian court. The ultimate result of these exchanges is the successful completion of the temple-building in Jerusalem. The decree in Ezra 7-10 seems to preempt the kind of conflict expressed in Ezra 1-6. Ezra, the reformer, is endowed with a mandate which unequivocally spells out the parameters of his judicial and political power. The stipulations of the decree of Artaxerxes serve to eliminate, immediately, the necessity of arbitration from the Persian court.

Unlike the Ezra 1-6 decrees, the decree of Artaxerxes in Ezra 7 does enable the ruling class, personified by Ezra, to exercise judicial discretion in punishing those who wish to challenge the Ezra mission through disobeying or undermining the position of Ezra. It must be noted that the decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes in Ezra 1-6 stop short of empowering the ruling elite of the province Beyond the River to make similar binding judicial and political judgments. Put differently, the decree in Ezra 1-6 does not provide the ruling elite in Jerusalem-Judah any real judicial and political power. It is true that the decree of Darius does have a judicial component (see Ez 6:11-12). However, as the following table shows, Ezra was granted full power to make judicial and political decisions, whereas in Ezra 6:11f the execution of judgment and the

enforcement of punishment is left in the hands of God. Unlike, Ezra 7-10, there is in Ezra 1-6 no one person delegated with the responsiblity of enforcing the law of God and/or the law of the king.

PUNISHMENT FOR DISOBEYING THE IMPERIAL DECREE

Decree of Darius (Ez 6:11-12)	*Decree of Artaxerxes (Ez 7:25-26)*
	And you, Ezra, according to the God-given wisdom you possess, appoint magistrates and judges who may judge all the people .....
Furthermore, I decree that if anyone alters this decree:	All who will not obey the law of your God and the law of the king let judgment be perfectly executed on them,
a beam shall be pulled out of the house of the perpetrator, who shall then be impaled on it. The house shall be made a dunghill.	whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of their goods or for imprisonment.
May the God who has established his name there overthrow any king or people that shall put forth a hand to alter this, or to destroy this house of God in Jerusalem.	*Blessed be the Lord, the God of our ancestors, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king to glorify the house of the Lord in Jerusalem.* [This verse, while similar to Ezra 6:12, is not considered a part of the formal decree of Artaxerxes.]

The absence of explicit conflict in Ezra 7-10 can be explained in terms of the wide ranging powers granted to Ezra to enforce both the law of God and the law of the king.

As stated above, the conflict discourse of Ezra 1-6 is striking because of its vocal

presence and explicitness, while the conflict discourse of Ezra 7-10 is implicitly present. The conflict discourse in the Nehemiah literary unit confines the conflict to the province Beyond the River. While Nehemiah's mission is continually undermined by Sanballot and company, the threats of Sanballot are neutralised by a simple, yet powerful claim made by Nehemiah, namely that Sanballot and company have no historic rights or claim to be a part of the reconstruction of Jerusalem-Judah. Never is the conflict, here, resolved by an appeal to Persia. Conflict resolution remains implicitly based on Nehemiah's mandate from the Persian court and as such conflict resolution remains an internal affair.

In sum, what the above analysis clearly demonstrates is that whether the conflict discourse is explicit or implicit, the resolution thereof is ultimately based upon the dictates of the imperial decrees of Persia. It is, therefore, necessary to decode the conflict discourse using the imperial decrees as the hermeneutical grid to assess the final outcome of the intense ideological conflict inherent in the E-N literature.

CHAPTER 7

THE MATERIAL CONDITIONS OF EZRA-NEHEMIAH

> ...the production of ideas, concepts and consciousness is first of all directly interwoven with the material intercourse of humankind (Eagleton 1976a).

The analysis of the E-N literature in the previous chapters of this study (especially Chapters 4, 5 & 6) would be extremely limited if not accompanied by an attempt to understand the E-N literature within the context of the material conditions impacting the production of ideology signified by the form and structure of the text. Such an attempt must not be misinterpreted as promoting a mechanistic movement from text to ideology to social social relations to productive forces (Eagleton 1976a:9). The position argued for above *vis-a-vis* the production of ideology in the E-N literature, gives primacy to literary and ideological concerns but not to the exclusion of political, economic and other social forces as they impact the production and subsequent interpretation of biblical literature like E-N. It is therefore imperative to try and reconstruct the social system and practices behind the E-N text to be able better to delineate the struggles inherent in the text (*see* Mosala 1989:102-103). Our concern, here, is to investigate the nature of the social-political-economic-religious background which contributes fundamentally to the hermeneutical framework as the exegete proceeds to interpret the E-N literature. Without an adequate understanding of the material world which the text describes, our interpretive exercises have a dire deficiency.

Our concern, then, is not primarily the world of the redactor but the material world of

the text. For reasons outlined in Chapter 3 above, Marxist social theory is best suited for the socio-historical reconstructions which are aimed at understanding issues of domination, economics and ideological hegemony. To the invaluable analytical insights drawn from Marxist social theory must be added important observations gleaned from the social theorist, Lenski (1966).

This chapter is divided into four major sections: Section One discusses and clarifies methodological issues concerning the question of political-economic reconstruction of Ancient Near Eastern (*hereafter* ANE) societies. Section Two and Three provide a brief outline of the legacy of the colonial domination of Palestine. In Section Four, we will posit a political-economic structure of Judah in the Persian period.

7.1 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

7.1.1 ANTIQUITY IN SOCIAL, MILITARY & ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

Social relations in the ANE: The application of the historical-materialist paradigm to non-capitalist societies always raises the methodological question of the nature of social relations in that particular world. With regard to the ANE, the pertinent question is: Was wealth (economics) ***the*** determining factor of the nature of social relations, or was status (kinship) the determining factor of social relations in the ANE?

Lenski's (1966) generically broad social structural analysis of agrarian societies serves

as a useful point of entry for a discussion of this nature. His basic theory of social relations in antiquity is that wealth in agrarian society is gained and kept through political power, and that one achieves political power through one's status in society. Status, in turn, is determined by a variety of social criteria, which include, e.g. one's family, citizenship. Thus, status and power were more important than wealth in ancient agrarian society (cf.Saldarini 1988:28). Lenski's approach to interpreting the nature of power relations and the principle of social organisation (albeit limited to agrarian society), presents a challenge to the premise of Marxist analysis which interprets social relations in relation to the economics forces which impact upon them. It is therefore crucial to evaluate carefully the interaction between the forces of production and the relations of production within the context of ancient society (*see* McLennan 1981).

If the interaction of the forces and relations of production are important, what theory of material and social relations will best assist us in this process of analysis? How best can we understand the nature and character of social relations in ancient Israel in general and the early Second Temple period in particular? The history of Israel is no doubt complicated and reflects various qualitatively different political, social, cultural and economic epochs (*see* Pixley 1992). Yet, it would not be overstating matters asserting that most of the history of Israel was one characterised by one or the other colonial power dominating Palestine. This is no less the case for the historical period which directly impacts the E-N literature, namely the Persian colonial domination of

Palestine (539-332 B.C.E.).

Certain qualities and characteristics seem to hold true for colonial regimes of antiquity and modernity alike. One such characteristic is the insatiable desire to dominate 'the other' either through direct dictatorship or colonial rule by extension, through colonial appointed indigenous leaders. (*See below for further discussion on the definition of domination*). With domination as a key characteristic of colonial ideology, the methodological question we raised above comes even more sharply into focus: How were social relations produced and maintained so as to reinforce the colonial desire to subjugate 'the other'. In this regard, more explicit questions are: Were social relations in the ancient world governed by status-honour-kinship or by economic forces? How was imperial hegemony maintained and by whom?

In order to answer these questions it becomes necessary to critically examine the interplay of economics, military power and political ideology in the context of ancient agrarian society using a plurality of sociological models. To this end we will use a combination of Lenski's structural-functionalist and Marx's conflict-based approach to sociological phenomenon.

Military power and ANE colonialism: Ancient Near Eastern colonial empires, which in the main were oriental in character (as opposed to agrarian-based social formations) made extensive use of military garrisons to enforce their hegemony. The garrisons

were, in turn, supported by the local economies which they occupied, protected and ruled. Thus, **a**, if not, **the**, most characteristic feature of ANE empires was their military machinery and its role as the enforcer of taxation and tribute-taking policies administered by colonial officials. Carney (1975:235-281) justifiably suggests that it might be more accurate to rename political and economic history of antiquity as the military history of antiquity.

Because the lust to dominate and subject people to the rule of one's empire must be seen within the context of the economic advantages such domination can bring, the social history of Palestine cannot be fully appreciated without due regard for its geopolitical significance in serving as a bridge for trade, although it was not the prime producer of traded goods. Although Palestine was only a thin strip of land (*see* Baly 1984:2) within the context of the Middle East, the surrounding areas were covetous of its strategic location:

> The entire Middle East is dominated by three great barriers to settlement and easy movement: the towering mountain chains of central Europe and Asia, the dry, forbidding deserts, and the penetrating fingers of the seas, which hold the whole area in their grip. This constriction has determined both the main concentrations of population and the course of the major routes, followed for century after century by both merchants and warriors. Although the notable trading cities of Tyre, Damascus, Palmyra and Petra lay just beyond the Palestinian borders, the routes they served crossed its territory (Baly 1984:1).

It is, therefore, understandable that Palestine, on one level, did not and could not have an isolated internal history but, rather, in some sense, was conditioned by the fact that it was the prisoner of its position as the major trading crossroad for the ANE.

Palestinian history can, therefore, be seen as being derived from two sources. On the

one hand, there were inescapable internal conflicts. On the other hand, it was in the best interest of any ANE imperial power to secure the control or support of Palestine. Palestinian history can, thus, be seen as two forces acting and reacting upon each other:

> ...imperial governments used the internal conflicts for their own purposes and the Palestinian communities in their desperation sought again and again the help of foreign authority to resolve their problems (Baly 1984:2).

It is no wonder that Soggin describes Palestine as:

> ...the theatre of engagements between whatever Mesopotamian power was in the ascendant and Egypt, a force which seems never to have renounced its sovereignty over Canaan. Moreover, first for Assyria and later for Babylon, as for Egypt, Canaan was either the launching pad for an attack or an indispensable advanced defensive position (Soggin 1984:221).

Bright succinctly describes Assyrian lust for colonial hegemonic control of Palestine when he says:

> Assyria coveted the lands beyond the Euphrates, both because of their valuable timber and mineral resources, and because they were the gateway to Egypt, to southwestern Asia Minor, and to the commerce of the Mediterranean. This is why Assyrian armies had for over a century made periodic campaigns into the West (Bright 1972:268).

The importance of military power, in terms of extracting economic wealth (tribute) and material resources, and thereby maintaining and sustaining hegemony, cannot be overestimated:

> In fact the Assyrians ushered in the Age of Empires, having perfected the battery of techniques requisite to their acquisition and maintenance: a professional army and bureaucracy and a law code (evolved by Hammurabi of Babylon), weights and measures, roads, colonies, the port of trade and - an Assyrian innovation - mass deportations. Once established, from this early date apparatus despotism was to become the form of government most characteristic of antiquity: more peoples laboured under it in more regions and

> for longer periods of time than any other. Under Assyria, for the first time, both Mesopotamia and (lower) Egypt (the "Four Corners of the Earth," as the Assyrians put it with characteristic grandiloquence) came under a single government. An era of unprecedented prosperity followed: the Persian Gulf, Red Sea, and Southeastern Mediterranean and the trade routes of the ancient Near East were all, effectively, under the control of a single empire-state (Carney 1975:255).

The foregoing discussion raises two important matters to be considered when trying to account for the material conditions of a *colonial-conscious* text such as E-N. First, if we follow Lenski's scenario that status in ancient society was more important than wealth, while wealth derived from status, we must then try to identify the status-granting agency. In other words, to locate the source of legitimacy in terms of status, we need to establish who it is that is granting the status. A question to ask *vis-a-vis* Lenski's emphasis on status is this: Is status an intrinsic value in and of itself? Who is the status-granting party? In an aside, if the question were put to a Persian aristocrat, for example, then, understandably, the Lenski scenario would appear to be valid, but if one were to ask a member of the agrarian populace in one of the colonies over whom the Persian aristocratic class exercised control, a very different answer might emerge. Such a person would certainly not have had the same socio-cultural point of reference as that of the aristocrat. It was true then, as it is true today, that the cultural world of an exploited person operated from a very different socio-economic base and notion of status than that of the exploiter, even though the exploiter might not think it to be the case, or even be aware that such a difference exists.

In an agrarian context of colonial imperialism, where the subjugated economy is

agrarian-based, the only legitimacy that a regime could enjoy was that espoused by its ruling or governing class. A case illustrating this is Judah during the Persian period, where it was the governing class (first, non-Jewish governors like Tattenai and, later, Jewish appointees like Ezra and Nehemiah) which communicated Persian hegemony, or interpreted Persian hegemony, so as to make colonial domination acceptable to the exploited peasants and all others excluded from the ranks of politico-economic and religio-cultural power.

Miller, in discussing the various conditions which favour the construction, reproduction and maintenance of dominance within a society, provides us with the following useful definition of dominance:

> By dominance I refer to the condition in which a set of ideas or practices, usually favourable to a particular minority within a society, appear to hold sway over the whole of that society and act to reproduce this same condition...Dominance may be exercised through sufficient coercive force as to be independent of the acquiescence of the dominated population, but more commonly it relates to principles of ideology and underlying discourses which structure both the construction of the subject and the subsequent acknowledgement by that subject of at least some of the legitimation claims made by the dominant group. Dominance therefore tends to be hegemonic, pervasive, exclusionary and conservative (Miller 1989:63).

Miller's definition of dominance explicitly refers to the imposition of a minority rule confined to the internal functioning of a society. Colonial empires of the ANE which dominated people groups with an agrarian-based system of social stratification, needed only a small minority ruling elite to govern their territories. Often the ruling elite were recruited from the local population, with only a single non-indigenous colonial administrator as part of that ruling strata. In the case of Judah, for example,

the minority ruling elite was thought to share the religio-cultural heritage of those over whom they wished to exercise control and power. The fact that the opposition in the E-N text had direct access to the Persian court in Babylonia suggests that the conflict in E-N was essentially between two elitist minority groups, each seeking to control and rule Judah. (*To this we return in more detail below*).

Imperial domination, in addition to being the imposition of minority interests, is by definition exploitative and is defined here as:

> ...a situation in which an individual or group of non-producers appropriates the surplus product created by the labour of direct producers, which is then harnessed to further the sectional interests of the non-producers (Tilley 1984:112).

Since imperialism, by definition, is premised on dominance and exploitation, the attendant question concerns the driving force of imperialism. What is it that drove the conquering empire of the ANE to extend its hegemonic tentacles? The answer is largely determined by the conceptual models which we apply to to the available sociological and archeaological data on the basis of which socio-historical reconstructions are hypothesised for that period of history. Carney has rightly pointed out that:

> It is no longer possible to delude ourselves that we see "reality" with a sort of immaculate perception - that the picture inside our heads is a one-to-one representation of the thing we are looking at (Carney 1975:1).

We, therefore, need to recognise that we filter information through the lenses of a particular sociological model(s) regardless of whether or not we know precisely what our theoretical model actually is. We note in Chapter 3, above, that there are

essentially three sociological models (Durkheimian, Weberian, and Marxist). Traditional Marxist thinking has a tendency toward the autonomy of economic interests and causes. As a corrective to strict economic determinism as a method, Miller (1989:71) soberly cautions that economics is but *one* in a whole series of potential sources for divisions within the forces that might construct dominance.

There is no doubt that colonial domination and exploitation in the ANE was dependent on the power of the military machinery to ensure the obedience of the colonised. The presence of military forces (garrisons) in a colonised region automatically altered the nature of social relationships. The colonial power, in order to secure its status, had to ensure that it controlled the productive forces of the land, through extracting tribute and heavy taxation. It would therefore not be unreasonable to assume that empires stood or fell by their ability to control the economic productive forces of the occupied land.

When analysing agrarian societies within a context of ANE colonial hegemony, one needs to appropriate systemic models which best illumine relationships of dominance and exploitation in the ancient world. Social status at the level of colonial domination and exploitation, it seems, must be a secondary consideration. What is of prime importance is to show the way in which a colonial regime in the ancient world was able to develop strategies whereby its control over the economic resources of the colony was seen to be legitimate, since a colonial power could not depend on a shared

cultural heritage with those whom it dominated. The Persian strategy of legitimising the Golah, an ex-ruling elite of Judah, as the new ruling elite of the region created a fascinating context of social dynamics, not least, a context of conflict. The returning ruling elite effectively dislodged the Persian-appointed ruling elite. One can only wonder why Persia would have deemed it necessary to support the *self-rule* concept for early Second Temple Palestine, contrary to the Babylonian colonial strategy preceding it.

Economics and social stratification in ANE society: The research of scholars such as Norman Gottwald shows the fundamental character of ANE colonialism to be that of tribute and tax extraction, i.e. a tributary mode of production. In an agrarian-based society like that of Second Temple Palestine, taxes took the form of agricultural produce.

Borrowing from the sociologist Max Weber, Lang (1983:116f) in his analysis of peasants and landlords in Near Eastern economic history, observes at least three ways in which a ruling elite extracts taxes from the agricultural production of the peasants identified as follows:

Patrimonial system: This is the right to taxation of a lord who inherits a village as his patrimonial domain.

Prebendal system: A lord may be paid by peasants in return for the exercise of some ecclesiastical or civil office.

Rent capitalism: A peasant who runs into debt becomes dependent on an urban money lender or merchant or may be forced to become a

> sharecropper or tenant farmer. In this system, also known as a mercantile system, "the urban propertied class skims off the largest portion of the agricultural produce as a regular income or "rent" claimed on the basis of liabilities or full urban ownership of land" (Lang 1983:117).

Some scholars (e.g. Weinberg) have argued that the Persian period should be understood in terms of a radical shift towards a cash economy, but, even though coinage has been found and dated to the period of Darius, it is unlikely that the dominant mode of surplus extraction took the form of money. Traditional agrarian societies are sustained through agricultural production, while surplus was gathered in central storehouses through taxation. The governing class redistributed the surplus goods according to status and occupational roles.

In an agrarian configuration of society, the social stratum which undergoes the most profound change in the wake of the imposition of colonialism is the *old* ruling elite. Lenski is extremely helpful in explaining that in agrarian societies there were two major classes: a *large* peasant class (about 90 percent of the population), responsible for producing the food to make society run, and a *small* governing elite, who protected the peasants from outside aggression. The elite lived off the agricultural surplus produced by the peasants. Strangely, a change in ruling elite did not affect the peasants greatly because of the nature of power relations. One was born into a social class and, by definition, remained there until death. There was very little class mobility. In such a configuration of social stratification, it really did not make much difference to the peasants who their rulers might be. Whoever exercised control

enforced the production of enough crops to ensure payment of compulsory tribute and taxes. Peasants had not only to feed themselves but also to produce enough to sustain the expenses of the local ruling elite and to pay tribute to the imperial king.

We need not get bogged down by Lenski's nine categories of social class in the ancient world (cf.Saldarini 1988:39). However, he does make a useful distinction within the ruling elite pointing out that a ruling elite can be further subdivided into divisions of colonial elite (if residing in the conquered land itself, e.g. a Persian governor in Judah) and a local or indigenous elite (a Jewish Persian governor in Judah, or a Jewish priest and so on). Lenski calls the local elite a *retainer* class. The retainer class includes soldiers, educators, religious functionaries, and skilled artisans, whose ultimate purpose is to extract wealth from their own people and to ensure a submissive attitude toward the colonial regime, as manifested locally in the form of a minority governing class.

We have already alluded to the fact that it was nearly impossible to change one's status in agrarian society. In capitalist society, an increase in one's economic status guarantees upward social-class mobility. In agrarian society, an increase in production levels (or, to use capitalist terminology, *profit margin*) did not imply a change in social class. Social class was fixed by birth or colonial appointment. Such appointment, in turn, was not necessarily on the basis of wealth but the extent to which such a person served and promoted the ideological interests of the colonial

ruling class.

Summary: Social relationships in the context of ANE society was strongly kinship-based at both the macro-social and micro-social levels. However, when such a society becomes a colonial subject, the terms of reference for macro-social reality undergoes profound change while the terms of reference for micro-social interaction remains essentailly the same. In terms of the nature of interaction between the indigenous culture and its imperial overlord, the driving force is not a shared cultural or kinship base. Rather, the relationship is clearly defined in terms of power and economics (tribute and tax). Thus, macro-social relationships in the context of ANE imperialism is best understood in terms of economic forces and not in terms of kinship structures. The categories are, however, not mutually exclusive and invariably function in combination with each other, as is clearly illustrated in the E-N literature.

7.1.2 SOCIO-HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION

Sources: The E-N story retells the experiences of the Jews in Palestine during the Persian epoch (539-332 B.C.E.). The particular focus of the literature is the context of Jerusalem-Judah. Blenkinsopp (1991:22) reminds us that as our principal biblical source, "E-N, covers only the first and last quarter of the first of these two centuries, and the information which it offers is refracted through several interpretive and ideological prisms". In other words, the E-N text is silent on the events during the middle decades of the first century of Persian rule in Palestine. For information about

the middle decades, we have to depend on sources such as Haggai and Zechariah (if, as here, we accept them to be dated from around this period). The E-N text, thus, reflects a gap from a completed temple in 516/15 B.C.E. under Darius I to the missions of Nehemiah and Ezra (dated mid-fourth century).

The silence of the text creates a few problems in terms of trying to understand the context of Judah and the mid-fourth-century missions of Ezra and Nehemiah. First, the precise dates for missions of Ezra and Nehemiah remain uncertain, with a range between 445 and 398 B.C.E. (*see* Widengren 1977:503 for a bibliography concerning the chronological order and dating of the Ezra and Nehemiah missions). Second, in addition to uncertainty concerning the date, the reason for the missions is at best conjectural (*see* Hoglund 1992). The desire of the Persians and Golah leaders to consolidate religious and civil reconstruction does of course count as a reason expressed in the E-N text. It is left to the exegete to give expression to the nexus of Persian and Golah interests within the context of early Second Temple Palestine. Third, there is insufficient data from which to construct adequately a context for the socio-economic conditions which lurk in the background of the E-N text.

We, therefore, have a text which, at best, is unclear about the historical chronology of events, is largely silent on the reasons for the missions of Ezra and Nehemiah, and is explicitly committed to the ideological programme of the Golah. Is it still feasible and possible to reconstruct the social forces behind the text when all our information is in

the text itself? The answer is, naturally, *yes*, but with one qualification. The qualification is that, due to the sparsity of the data available, we need to depend heavily on *patterns* of social formation rather than to try to locate minute details.

It is because of the silence of the text with regard to detail, the problems of socio-historical reconstruction notwithstanding, that we need to understand the pattern of Persian colonial hegemony. As Horsley (1991) says, we must not assume that life in Judah was so different from other societies in the empire. Also, in order to appreciate the impact of the Persian colonial hegemony in the ANE, especially its impact on Judah, such hegemony needs to be compared and contrasted with its forerunners, Assyria and Babylon. A comparison of the colonial strategies and policies of Persia with that of Assyria and Babylon is of inestimable value as the social historian comes to grips with the particularities of the political economy of Judah during the Persian period. The geopolitical location of Palestine makes such a comparison mandatory.

We, however, need to be careful not to overstate the microsocial (Palestinian) impact of the macrosocial (ANE empires) structural changes, especially when one regime is conquered by another. A change of colonial power did not necessarily imply a radical change in the basic social structure and fabric which governed the lives of the majority of the agrarian population of Palestine. On one level, the interests of the peasants were simply unimportant to the ruling class. The only important thing was extracting surplus to maintain the hegemonic powers, locally and internationally.

A historical-materialist paradigm, indeed, any macro-social model of analysis, presupposes a more or less adequate database of sociological information from which one can draw in terms of reconstructing the material context of the text. The sources informing any reconstruction of the life of the Judahites in the Persian period include both biblical and non-biblical evidence. These have been identified, described and classified (*see* Widengren 1977:489-503; Williamson 1987:14-36) and thus far include: *Jewish-biblical sources* (E-N, Isaiah 40-66, Haggai and Zechariah, Malachi, Esther), *Jewish non-biblical sources* (Josephus [bk XI], papyri from Elephantine and Samaria [Wadi Daliyeh]), *historical cuneiform texts* (Nabonidus chronicle, Cyrus Cylinder, Aramaic papyri and leather documents, Murashu texts (i.e., cuneiform from Babylonia), *archaeological evidence* (from over 50 Palestinian sites which show remains from the Persian period).

Approaches: Identifying the sources for historical reconstruction is, no doubt, the easiest task. The challenge concerns the way in which one collates the data gleaned from the source material. How does one reconstruct a social history of the Jews during the Persian period? In spite of creative and exhaustive studies from scholars such as Kippenberg (1982); Kreissig (1973); Weinberg (1973b, 1976, 1992) and Schottroff (1974), Hoglund notes that:

> We still lack a clear, thorough assessment of Achaemenid imperial rule in Judah and the extent to which such rule shaped and oriented the basic social constitution of the postexilic community (Hoglund 1991:54).

What is it about the studies that make them deficient or in need of updating? Hoglund

does not ask the question of these scholarly works. He does not provide any critique on this level except to note that scholars lack a clear sociological method (cf.Horsley 1991).

The problematic nature of both the biblical and non-biblical sources (*see* Grabbe 1991:99ff) leads Hoglund (1991:55) to conclude that "it is simply not possible to reconstruct an accurate understanding of the social context of the postexilic community solely on the basis of literary sources." He suggests that:

> ...it is absolutely essential that any investigation of the Achaemenid imperial context of the Judaean community actively utilizes the evidence of the material culture of the Levant under Achaemenid rule as an independent data source with a different orientation. Indeed, ...it is the patterning of the postexilic community's material remains when combined with a consciousness of the social dimensions of imperial rule that provides the surest evidence of social transformations under the Achaemenids (Hoglund 1991:57).

Blenkinsopp is less confident than Hoglund in terms of using archaeology as an "independent data source". In fact, according to Blenkinsopp:

> The very sparse archaeological data available allow for a somewhat broader perspective, but their interpretation is no less elusive and even more subject to revision and subversion by new discoveries or new interpretations (Blenkinsopp 1991b:22):.

It is for this reason that Blenkinsopp prefers a recourse to:

> ...comparative data, in this instance information on the sociopolitical and economic function of temples in other parts of the Achaemenid empire, especially Asia Minor and Mesopotamia (Blenkinsopp 1991b:22).

The methodological preferences of Blenkinsopp (reliance on comparative literary evidence) and Hoglund (the independent status of archaeological discoveries) underline the problems facing a social historian of the period. How does one

adequately account for the data available?

We have here, it seems, a methodological impasse, not unlike the one which we discuss above, relative to the literary character and composition of the E-N literature in general.

Horsley (1991), reflecting methodologically on the implications of a historical-sociological analysis of the Second Temple period and, thereby, responding to Blenkinsopp's analysis of the role of temples in the Persian Period, reminds us of three important obstacles facing the social historian of the period or of any other period of ancient biblical history. The first is related to the distortive conceptual apparatus of biblical and religious studies. Here, Horsley makes the point that we cannot see religious matters as separable from the political or economic sphere of life, especially in agrarian societies in which:

> 'Religion' is embedded with kinship and/or local community life and/or 'the state'...There was simply no structural or institutional differentiation yet, so we cannot pretend that 'religion' or 'Judaism' is somehow a separable subject of investigation (Horsley 1991:163-164).

The temple in Jerusalem was more than a religious centre; it was indeed a political-economic institution.

While we can fault Blenkinsopp's methodological presuppositions, in his attempt to understand 'religion' as separate from economics or politics, his comparative study on temples in the ANE during the Persian period is extremely illuminating. On the basis

of Blenkinsopp's fine analysis and the need for a sharper conceptual-methodological clarity, we can sharpen his conclusion to describe the Jerusalem temple in the restoration period as:

> ...the religiously legitimated political-economic base of provincial ruling classes [which] provided *the social form* of domination and exploitation in certain areas - 'to the evident advantage of the imperial exchequer' indeed! (Horsley 1991:172).

Naturally we need much more detailed argument to sustain such a conclusion, which we hope this study provides, but herein is raised Horsley's (1991:164) second critique, which concerns the *amount* of data available for social reconstruction. He reminds us that there is too little data from tiny Palestine to postulate any definitive and effective social reconstruction. We, therefore, have to reach for comparative data:

> ...on the assumption that Second Temple Judah was not all that different from other neighbouring societies and that comparisons and contrasts with traditional, class-divided, agrarian societies will be important (Horsley 1991:164).

A third concern raised by Horsley is that of theoretical models. He notes that:

> Any historical reconstruction, however, will depend upon the particular model or scheme that is presupposed or critically assembled. Correspondingly, the model that is projected onto the ancient Near East and onto the biblical history sets up or invites certain hypotheses or conclusions, and inhibits others (Horsley 1991:165).

The use of sociological models is, of course, a perennial problem in a sociological approach to the Bible (*see* Chapter 3 above; *also* cf. Carney 1975), no less so in E-N studies and the reconstruction of the history for the period. Scholars such as Weinberg (1973, 1976), Kreissig (1973), Kippenberg (1978) have applied (superimposed!) various forms of a Marxist-oriented model on the Second Temple source data. Their

analyses, while very illuminating, have also been seen to be limited. There has been an uncritical acceptance of the Marxist theoretical four-stage historical development thought to be universally applicable. Even within Marx's own work, there is a recognition that in pre-capitalist economic systems the modes of production might have been different and indeed more flexible than previously thought. Horsley makes the point:

> It was not until the publication of Marx's *Grundrisse*...that historians awoke to the possibility that ANE political-economic forms may have been distinctive, different both from Greek and Roman patterns and from European feudalism (Horsley 1991:165).

Thus, the methodological critique of Weinberg's ground-breaking work on the *Bürger-Tempel-Gemeinde* structure of Second Temple society, and of any uncritical application of Marxist economic theory to ancient society, is that the motor of ancient society was not necessarily economics (as Marx argues to be the case in capitalist society). Weinberg argues that the rise of the *Bürger-Tempel-Gemeinde* form is as a result of the intensification of trade and an active urbanisation process, leading to a fading of social distinctions between the state sector and the communal-private sector, and the rise of a commodity-money economy. The critical question posed to Weinberg's hypothesis is: Was the money-economy so developed that it was a formidable factor in influencing structural change in Judah? Taxes and tribute were certainly paid, but included payment in kind, as did trade. The level of trade certainly did not have such an impact as to facilitate radical structural reorganisation of city and village for the period. To these issues we return in more detailed discussion below.

Summary: The above discussion has in some ways taken us beyond a discussion which focuses strictly on methodological issues in the reconstruction of a social history of ancient societies. What the above discussion helps us to recognise is the need, especially for the biblical exegete, to clarify the methodological apparatus guiding the proposed research, which we now attempt to do.

7.1.3 DEVELOPING A MODEL FOR SOCIO-HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION

Elements of an adequate model: The E-N text is a conflict-ridden text. As such, it calls out for the application of a radical-conflict model approach. The essential story line is that of a group of aristocratic former-ruling-elite Jews who return to the land of their ancestors. They are supported politically, ideologically and economically by the Persian colonial regime. In spite of radical opposition, the returnees are eventually able to reassert their authority and power in the land they and their forebears once ruled. The extent of their hegemony-control-power cannot be assumed and, therefore, needs to be discussed in more detail. However, whether the control is confined to Judah or is a vision of pre-Monarchic geopolitical boundaries, the restoration context is one which is premised on conflict. The conflict constitutes rivalries over who is to embody the legitimate priesthood, struggles over who is to determine the shape of the national heritage in terms of building religio-cultural institutions, regulation of control over access to the economic resources, and definition of the geopolitical boundaries of a post-Babylonian Judah. The radical conflict between the returnees and the people of the land is not resolved theologically but *politically*. The Persian authorities are

ultimately convinced that the returnees (Golah) are the only legitimate representatives of the religio-cultural heritage of the Jews and, therefore, only they have a right to enjoy the benefits of Persian political support and economic sponsorship. There is, of course, no evidence that the Golah, themselves, engage explicitly in a process of convincing the Persian authorities concerning their envisaged ruling class status in Jerusalem-Judah. The compilers creatively present the Golah as the passive recipients rather than activists seeking Persian legitimation (*see Chapter 5 & 6 above*). The imperial decrees in E-N thus serve as confirmation of the Persian vote of confidence in the Jewish leaders who return to their homeland from the Persian colonial headquarters.

The methodological question is this: Can a radical conflict model, which lays primary emphasis on economic factors, adequately explain the struggles inherent in the E-N text? Radical conflict theory derives stratification from the conflicting needs, desires and values of individual sub-groups in society which are acted out in a struggle for goods in short supply.

Lenski, in an attempt to formulate a sociological model which best represents social patterns and organisation in ancient society, synthesises the conservative functionalist tradition with radical conflict theories. He stresses multiple variables and their interrelations as found in both modern and ancient societies. The struggles and assumptions as signified by the E-N text will certainly need to guide the exegete and

provide the kinds of questions we need to ask *vis-a-vis* the various colonial epochs affecting Palestine in general and Judah in particular.

Geopolitical concerns: land and resettlement in Judah: One striking feature of E-N is the land resettlement policy contained within. We have already noted that, ideologically, E-N differs from Chronicles in displaying an awareness that there are people in the land. The assumption in Chronicles is, however, that the land is necessarily empty, but that, ideologically, no problems are encountered in terms of land-possession, an assumption which, as Japhet (1983:114) correctly remarks, does not reflect the actual historical processes and situation. Thus it is necessary to pay attention to geopolitical configurations during the colonial period of Israel's history.

Deportation: population displacement: A corollary of geopolitical concerns is, of course, population displacement. In order to appreciate the Persian colonial praxis it needs to be contrasted with that of Assyrian and Babylonian colonial strategies. Both Assyria and Babylon used deportation as a means of controlling and suppressing nationalistic tendencies in the colonies. Persia, on the other hand, repatriated those deported by Assyria and Babylon. The result of population displacement was cultural diffusion, including intermarriage. Naturally, the questions of cultural identity and social organisation were matters that needed attention in Judah after Persian repatriation.

Religio-cultural (re)definition: Another striking feature of the E-N text is the urgent need to define the identity of the legitimate carriers of the traditions of Israel, made most explicit by the conflict over who could legitimately participate in the rebuilding of the temple. The legitimacy crisis is ultimately resolved through political diplomacy which results in Persia's support for the *Golah* as opposed to the *people of the land*, clearly manifested in the imperial decrees which the text quotes as evidence for the political and religious legitimacy of the exilic community. We might then well ask: To what extent did colonial powers of the ANE meddle in the *religious* affairs of the conquered? Once again, part of the answer to the question is tied up with the imperial decrees promulgated by the Persian colonial regime.

Economics: a tributary mode of production: Another aspect of colonial rule which affected the social fabric of society was taxation and the tribute-taking policies of ANE powers. A characteristic feature of colonial rule in the ANE was its enforced extraction of wealth from the colonised. In the Persian period, national religious temples served as centres for tax collection. The Persian sponsorship of the temple-rebuilding programme cannot be seen in isolation from the broader programme of economic manipulation of local economies.

***Summary*:** What then is the content of a socio-historical model which can reconstruct the material conditions of the E-N text? First, we need to make explicit the kind of model which the exegete prefers to use, in this case, following the broad contours of a

Marxist model. Second, in terms of the actual content of the model, we note that economics alone does not explain the total picture of ANE colonialism. In the case of E-N, we need to take seriously Israel's legacy of colonial domination under Assyria and Babylon. During these colonial epochs, which, by comparison to the Persian period, were brutal in their policies, there were created a host of issues which, of necessity, would need sorting out if the Jewish community were ever going to survive. In sum, according to the compilers of E-N, the impact of population displacement, the forging of a new cultural identity, the rezoning of the land, the restructuring of the economy and the need to militarise the city were some of the issues that needed immediate attention during the Persian era. These issues then provide the descriptive elements of a model for socio-historical reconstruction of life in Palestine during the Persian era.

7.2 THE LEGACY OF ASSYRIAN COLONIALISM

7.2.1 THE PRE-COLONIAL NORTH-SOUTH DIVIDE

The death of Solomon (926 or 922 B.C.E.) brought to fruition the final schism of the united monarchy of Israel, giving political expression (i.e. North-South) to a cultural divide that pre-existed its political form in the two monarchies. The geopolitical entity in the North called itself Israel, while the South was named Judah (cf.1 Kings 12,13,14). Gottwald (1985:342) argues that "The immediate cause of the breakup of the united kingdom was the oppressive economic and political policies of Solomon". The two separate geopolitical spheres never again emerged as a united front except for

a short period during the Hasmonian period.

It is understandable that the southern region would be more tied to the house of David, a bond which was to last till the exile (587/86 B.C.E.). The South adhered to a "dynastic principle" of leadership (Gottwald 1985:346). The South was less harassed than its northern neighbour, probably due to the fact that it was an eminently poorer region, with little to offer, composed almost exclusively of steppe and hill-country, as well as being a rather isolated region, far from the great lines of communication by land and sea (Soggin 1984:191). Geographically, the South was isolated and compact, unlike the North which was spread out "over a large territory in three mountain massifs and in the valleys and plains around them" (Gottwald 1985:347). Naturally, it was more difficult to centralise such a region.

The North, on the other hand, was near to the great lines of communication, "with substantial means of production in the spheres of agriculture, cattle-rearing and crafts, especially in the plains under the control of the city-states" (Soggin 1984:191). Soggin makes the point that the North, obviously had a series of features, especially in economic terms, which cried out to be exploited. He goes on to say that:

> ...we can deduce from all this that on the political and cultural plane, too, at least to begin with it probably had a far greater importance than the South (Soggin 1984:192).

During the first decades of their independence the two regions were in radical confrontation with each other. The fight over land, i.e. the geopolitical space of each

kingdom, was not the least of the conflicts. The history of the period is replete with both national and international wars, all affecting the size of the land of each kingdom. In the early period, for example, the South (Judah) wanted to extend her northern border, since it was just a few miles (12 miles) North of the capital Jerusalem. The north, however, which then included a large part of the Canaanite city states, with their economic structures and their armies, was able to extend southwards to about 5 miles north of Jerusalem (Soggin 1984:199).

The North-South schism can be seen to be the start of the constant shifting of the geopolitical boundaries of the two distinct regions, not least of all because Palestine in general was, as Soggin (1984:221) has pointed out, either a launching pad or a defensive position for whatever Mesopotamian power was in the ascendant and Egypt.

7.2.2 ASSYRIAN DOMINATION and IMPERIALISM (738-630 B.C.E.)

The reason for the Assyrian hunger for hegemonic control over the western regions including Palestine is due to the valuable timber and mineral resources, and because they were the gateway to Egypt, to southwestern Asia Minor, and to the commerce of the Mediterranean. It is no wonder that Assyrian armies had for over a century made periodic campaigns into the West (Bright 1972:268).

The political instability of the North facilitated to a great extent the satisfying of Assyrian imperialistic hunger. Within ten years after the death of Jeroboam the

Northern Kingdom was ruled by five kings, "three of them seizing the throne by violence, none with the slightest pretext of legitimacy" (Bright 1972:269). The country was wracked by civil war and uncertainty.

With a series of three decisive military campaigns, Assyria transformed the Northern Kingdom (Israel) into an Assyrian province. The first two campaigns, 738 B.C.E. and 734 B.C.E., were headed by the warrior king Tiglath-Pileser III (754-727 B.C.E.). In 722 B.C.E., the third campaign, under the kingship of Sargon II, resulted in the siege of Samaria, the capital city. The Northern kingdom was finally and completely under Assyrian domination.

The fall of Samaria spelled the end of the dominance of an identifiable "ethnic" Israelite community in the North. Thousands of its citizens were deported to Upper Mesopotamia and Media (Bright 1972:274). It was Assyria's policy to ensure that no one cultural group dominated to the extent of becoming a threat to the Assyrian hegemony. To overcome any such threat, sections of other dissident cultural groups in the Assyrian empire were deported elsewhere. This is how northern Israel came to receive deportees from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim (2 Kings 17:24). Naturally the foreigners brought with them their native customs and practices (vv.29-31). Cultural mixing was inevitable. In sum:

> ...Samaria became a province of the Assyrian empire; its ruling class was deported and replaced by persons appointed *ad hoc*...the region came to have a semi-foreign population with a syncretistic religion, in which YHWH, too, is said to have been worshipped alongside the deities of the new ruling cult. This

> note does not so much give us factual information as anticipate the post-exilic polemic against the Samaritans: it is aimed at casting aspersions on their religion, because the Jerusalem priesthood considered the group heterodox and heretical (Soggin 1984:230).

The South, i.e. Judah, escaped the calamity which overtook the North by appealing to the Assyrian regime for protection (2 Kings 16:7). The appeal on the part of the southern King Ahaz (735-715 B.C.E.) automatically resulted in the transformation of Judah into what Pixley (1992:79) describes as a "satellite that rendered tribute to Assyria and was submissive to Assyrian foreign policy". The tribute demanded by Assyria was heavy enough to cause Ahaz to empty his treasury and strip the temple in order to raise enough tribute (2 Kings 16:8,17). The idea of stripping the temple to pay tax is propagandistic and must be seen in context, because the impression created by a surface reading of the text is that the ruling class was burdened to pay tribute out of its own resources, which seems very unlikely. What sounds more likely is that the heaviest tax burden was carried by the poorer classes of Judah. The most cursory reading of contemporary prophetic material (Amos and Micah) shows that wealth was concentrated in the hands of a few. The landholders dispossessed the poor and were extremely corrupt (Isa 3:13-15; 5:1-7,8; Micah 2:1f.,9). There was no justice for the poor in a context where judges could be bribed (Isa 1:21-23; 5:23; 10:1-4 Micah 3:1-4,9-11). The official religion, of course, offered no critique of the socio-economic realities of the society. In fact, what the official cult did offer was the perspective that Yahweh only demanded correctly performed rituals and sacrifices (Isa 1:10-17). The socio-economic injustices plaguing the society were automatically spared critique and were allowed to continue.

Throughout the reign of the Assyrian monarch Sargon, Judah played a waiting game, waiting for the right moment to try to break the stranglehold of Assyrian hegemony. The break came when Sennacherib, son of Sargon, succeeded his father to the throne. Hezekiah, son of Ahaz, who had already succeeded his father to the throne, "rebelled against the king of Assyria" (2 Kings 18:7), i.e. against Sennacharib, and took steps to secure Judah's independence from Assyria.

Sennacherib, in 701 B.C.E., marched through the Assyrian empire, quelling disenchantment with Assyrian rule by means of brute force. The historical problem in terms of whether Sennacherib engaged in one or two campaigns in Palestine is dealt with, extensively, by Bright (1972:296-308). We, here, follow Bright's hypothesis that there were two campaigns, one in 701 B.C.E. and one later. The Assyrian invasion meant that forty-six of Judah's fortified cities were reduced and their populations deported (Bright 1972:284). The fate of Hezekiah and the remnant of his troops is described graphically in Isaiah 1:4-9: "like a bird in a cage". Bright (1972:284) tells us that excavations at Lachish, which Sennacherib stormed, reveal, along with evidences of destruction, a huge pit into which the remains of some 1,500 bodies had been dumped and covered with pig bones and other debris - presumably the garbage of the Assyrian army. Hezekiah's *punishment* for revolting included a radical increase in tribute extraction, and he was obliged to strip the temple and royal treasury in order to raise the amount required by Assyria. In addition, Hezekiah's daughters were taken as concubines.

Between 701 and 691 B.C.E., the Assyrian regime was preoccupied with a disruptive Babylonian region. At the same time, a strong Egyptian ruler named Tirhakah emerged. A combination of these factors could well have moved Hezekiah once again to oppose Assyrian hegemony. Sennacherib, having brutally quelled rebellion in Babylon, now turned his focus again to the West. However, he could not match Hezekiah's drive to regain *independence*. Unable to enter the city militarily, he sent a political envoy demanding the surrender of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was, therefore, *not militarily* occupied. It was Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, who gave up the fighting spirit of his father and made peace with Assyria. Judah-Jerusalem was, thus, to remain a vassal of the Assyrian regime for the next century, until the Babylonian conquest of Palestine.

Features of Assyrian Imperialism: The characteristic and almost stereotypical features of Assyrian imperialism can be described in terms of a reputation for cruelty due to a permanent and professional army equipped not only with chariots but with mounted cavalry (Soggin 1984:222), a harsh policy of tribute extraction from the colonised, and a radical deportation policy.

Assyrian military-economic policy: A chief characteristic of Assyrian colonial occupation was its deployment of the much-hated garrison troops, which ensured the payment of heavy taxation, keeping the Assyrian military machine alive, as well as ensuring the flow of tribute and taxes to the colonial headquarters. The local

population can be described as financing the very military watch-dog on their front step. The military machine would need funding if it were to remain a faithful and effective ideological force. The logical answer to the funding of the military was, naturally, the heavy taxation of the conquered masses. Spieckermann (1982), referred to by Smith (1989:27), remarks that Assyria was engaged in economic strangulation through tributes and the religiously-based symbolism of occupation.

The Assyrian empire is almost stereotyped by the Deuteronomic historian as being brutal, but the reality of Assyrian oppression was probably not far removed from the harsh biblical assessment. The tribute extraction from the land was punishing and heavy (2 Kings 15:20; 2 Kings 18:14ff), while temple walls were plundered (2 Kings 16:8; 17ff: 2 Kings 18:15). The huge military machinery ensured the flow of goods from the periphery to the centre (Smith 1989:28). The peasants were forced, by virtue of the presence of a brutal military might, to pay taxes, which invariably meant extra produce from land which probably was over-cultivated already.

Assyrian socio-economic policy: Tiglath-pileser III (745-727 B.C.E.), the warrior king of Assyria, adopted a socio-economic policy which was to have disastrous consequences for the ethnic future of any group identifying themselves as Israelites or Jews:

> Instead of contenting himself with receiving tribute from native princes and punishing rebellion with brutal reprisals, Tiglath-pileser, when rebellion occurred, habitually deported the offenders and incorporated their lands as provinces of the empire, hoping in this way to quench all patriotic sentiment

capable of nurturing resistance (Bright 1972:269).

Assyrian political administration: Tiglath-pileser III (745-727 B.C.E.) was the one to lead the neo-Assyrian empire to its height, "the true inaugurator of Assyrian power on an 'empire scale'" (Smith 1989:17). He reformed the structure of the state, changing great provinces, which were difficult to administer, into smaller, manageable districts. His new imperialistic foreign policy included the abandonment of the traditional vassalage; instead, he incorporated peoples directly into the empire and occupied their territory with the added feature of a demand for heavy tribute (Soggin 1984:223; Smith 1989:18). Any sign of rebellion was met with direct military intervention, the annexation of the territory in question, and the imposition of a pro-Assyrian ruler. Any sign of rebellion from within a given territory was again met with military intervention, while the responsible ruler was deposed and replaced by an Assyrian governor. The leading class was deported, and new ethnic groups were imported. Also, many peoples were imported from various parts of the Assyrian empire in exchange for the deported Israelites (*see* 2 Kings 17).

Assyrian deportation strategy: Smith (1989:29) notes that the neo-Assyrian regime perfected the policy of deportation. It is estimated that over 4,500,00 people were forcefully uprooted and exiled. The single largest deportation was 208,000 taken from Babylonia in the south into Assyrian territory in the north. Smith (1989:29) remarks that *"these numbers dwarf even the highest estimates for the Babylonian Exile of the Jews from Judah*" (italics Smith's).

***Assyrian and Babylonian colonial policy - A preliminary comparison**:* Babylonian aggression in the ANE is described below. However, the difference between Assyrian and Babylonian deportation policy, seems to be that the Assyrians deported whole families (*see* Jer 29), while the Babylonians were more selective (2 Kings 15:29; 17:6; 24:14-16 Jer 52:28-30), deporting just the ruling class. Also, the Assyrians exchanged populations, while the Babylonians brought the exiles into the heartland of Babylonia. Thus, while the Assyrians exploited the local economies, the Babylonians used the expertise from the colonies to build the infrastructure of the imperial heartland capital.

The role of Esar-haddon (680-669 B.C.E.): The E-N literature makes specific reference to the Assyrian ruler Esar-haddon (Ez 4:2), evoked within the context of ideological conflict concerning which colonial experience is to be considered legitimate *vis-a-vis* identifying those who qualify to participate in the rebuilding of the temple (*see Chapter 6 above*). A few comments concerning Esar-haddon are therefore appropriate.

Sennacherib was murdered by his sons and succeeded by his younger son, Esar-haddon. It was Esar-haddon who managed to stabilise the situation in Babylon, and restored the city and the temple of Marduk which his father had destroyed (Bright 1972:310). One of Esar-haddon's primary concerns, however, was Egypt, a niggling nuisance to Assyrian expansion. Egypt managed to resist Assyrian imperialism, and it was Esar-haddon who planned to put an end to the situation.

In 671 B.C.E. Esar-haddon uprooted Tirhakah, occupying Memphis, where the royal family was seized together with the treasures of the Egyptian court. As was their policy, the Assyrians demanded tribute and allowed the native princes to rule their districts under the oversight of Assyrian governors. Egyptian resistance resurfaced again and was finally crushed by Assur-banapal (688-627 B.C.E.), son of Sennacherib.

It is worth noting that Assyria achieved its greatest expansion under Esar-haddon (680-669 B.C.E.), who also succeeded in humiliating Egypt by conquering and occupying it. This might be the reason why he, of all the Assyrian rulers, is specifically mentioned by the compilers of E-N. However, in 655 B.C.E. Egypt regained its independence.

It is also interesting to note that the E-N classifies the Assyrian-aligned Jews (i.e. those brought to Judah by Esar-haddon) as belonging to those denied access to *Golah-based* Jewish identity in Second Temple Jerusalem-Judah, and called *people of the land*. Golah-based Judean antagonism towards Assyrian-based Jewish identity is possibly explained in terms of events during the Assyrian period. The pro-Assyrian Judean king Amon (son of Manasseh, son of Hezekiah, son of Ahaz), was assassinated by, probably, an anti-Assyrian nationalist group. Bright remarks that those who felt that the time was not yet ripe for a change in national policy to a break with Assyria were an assembly of landed aristocracy, called the *people of the land*.

They executed the assassins of the loyal pro-Assyrian King Amon, placing eight-year-old Josiah on the throne. We have, here, the descriptive title *people of the land* representing the ruling class whose interests were surely served by Assyrian hegemony.

It is likely that the Golah-based ruling class never forgot the actions of the loyal-Assyrian Jews. The explicit recalling of Esar-haddon is, therefore, not incidental. The Golah-based Jews were determined to exclude the Assyrian-aligned Jews, even though Esar-haddon repatriated Jews, as did Persian King Cyrus some time later.

Transition from Assyrian to Babylonian Imperialism: Assyria's grip on the ANE was fast slackening. For Judah this meant a chance to revive feelings of independence, which, by 622 B.C.E., Josiah had made a reality. Judah was, for all intents and purposes, a free country under the leadership of Josiah, although, officially still an Assyrian colony.

Josiah, the infant-monarch, was put on the throne by the landed aristocracy. Not surprisingly, the major contours of Josiah's reforms served the interests of that aristocracy. The purification of aspects of Assyrian religion from the temple was a major priority (*see* Nakasone 1993). It becomes more clear, now, why the Golah-based Jewish identity was so antagonistic toward those claiming Jewish identity and requesting to be included in the rebuilding programme based on Assyrian-aligned

colonial identity and experience. It is, therefore, conceivable that the antagonism and rivalry between the Golah-based ruling elite and the Assyrian-based Jews reach back to ideological and political differences rather than strict religious differences. In this way, it is possible to give voice to the silence of E-N *vis-a-vis* the strong denial of access to Jewish identity of Assyrian-based Jews. Also, it is this interpretation, i.e. antagonism within the ruling-class strata of Second Temple Jewish society, that must temper an analysis of the southern-motivated *religious* reforms of someone like Josiah. His reform was far-reaching, extending northwards to include the shrines of Samaria, "particularly the rival of Bethel, desecrated and destroyed and their priest put to death" (Bright 1972:318). Josiah strategically centralised the cult at Jerusalem. Rural priests were invited to take their seats among the clergy (2 Kings 23:8).

Josiah's reforms, at the very minimum, elevated the self-esteem of Jerusalem and its ruling elite. The advent of Babylonian colonialism was about to invert the very accomplishments of Josiah by not only banishing the ruling elite of Jerusalem but ultimately destroying the temple.

7.3 BABYLONIAN DOMINATION and IMPERIALISM

7.3.1 THE COLLAPSE OF JUDAH

Judah continued to live for just less than a hundred years in the shadow of conflicts between the great powers, first, as a vassal of Assyria, then, of Egypt (till 605 B.C.E.), and, finally, of Babylon. In 597/6 B.C.E. and 587/6 B.C.E., Babylon entered Judah

and Jerusalem and deported the most qualified elements of its population. The people who returned to the land in the wake of the fall of Babylon to Persia (539/38 B.C.E.) and of the decree of Cyrus came from the deported upper class of Judean society. Their mission was to rebuild Jerusalem, the traditional capital and the temple, thereby reestablishing the status of Jerusalem-Judah within the context of the autonomy of the province of Judaea under the sovereignty of Persia (cf.Soggin 1984:231).

The Assyrian conquest of the North, coupled with the fact that Judah, through skilled political diplomacy, managed to retain political independence, had far-reaching ideological implications. It meant, first, that even though a vassal to Assyria, Judah had no enemies in the North. Second, it could claim to be considered the only heir to the religious tradition of Israel and its worship, as well as to the Davidic ideology and state. Also, the South never really accepted the separation of the North from the united kingdom. This then meant, third, that it could regard itself as the entrusted representative of all Israel.

The fact that Judah was needed as a buffer between the Mesopotamian empire and the Egyptian empire did not have dire consequences for Judah. Both empires needed the region, prompting the skilled diplomacy characterising the leadership of Judah. Eventually, of course, Judah lost the political chess game and was razed to the ground by the Babylonians.

When Nebuchadrezzar II of Babylon defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish (cf.Jer 46:2), the region became the domain of the Babylonians. Judah automatically came under Babylonian rule, even though ruled until 601/00 B.C.E. by the vassal Jehoiakim. The Babylonian regime, with a force comprised of Babylonians and Ammorite, Edomite and Moabite allies, captured Jerusalem in 598 B.C.E. Jehoiakim died with the siege of Jerusalem and was succeeded by his 18-year-old son Jehoiachin, who, along with part of the ruling class, including the prophet Ezekiel (2 Kings 24:14; Jer 52:28), was deported to Babylon in 597/8 B.C.E..

Nebuchadrezzar appointed Zedekiah as king but Zedekiah only functioned as a regent, with limited authority, since the legitimate king was still alive, although deported. During the ten-year period between the Babylonian seige of Jerusalem and its being razed to the ground, Judah divided into factions: a pro-Egyptian faction, which sought to continue the line of Jehoiakim, and a pro-Babylonian faction, which accepted the sovereignty of Babylon. The pro-Babylonian group was supported by the prophet Jeremiah and reflected the aspirations of the young deported King Jehoiachin, the son of Jehoiakim. Zedekiah's anti-Babylonian coalition was supported by Egypt (cf.Jer 27-28) but collapsed. In 589/88 B.C.E., another anti-Babylonian coalition, supported by Egypt, Tyre, Ammon, and Edom, was destroyed by Nebuchadrezzar; Jerusalem was besieged in 587 B.C.E. In August 586 B.C.E., Jerusalem was destroyed. Egyptian troops, on whom Judah depended, were defeated by the Babylonians before they could reach Jerusalem. Zedekiah was deported, his family killed, the temple furnishings

carried off, the temple burnt, and the fortifications of the city dismantled. Many other places in Judah met the same fate as Jerusalem. Those deported in the wake of the destruction of Jerusalem included part of the leading class and some craftsmen (cf.Jer 52:28-30). The second deportation, says Smith (1989:21), was more general, according to the evidence of 2 Kings 25:11 and Jeremiah 52:15ff.

7.3.2 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF BABYLONIAN HEGEMONY

Structure of local government: The Babylonian colonial policy of local government differed from the Assyrians, in that the Babylonians appointed a governor who was drawn from the local Jewish nobility, in this case, a certain Gedaliah (Jer 40:7; 2 Kings 25:22ff.).

Land policies: On the question of land, the Babylonians were unique in their approach. They redistributed the land of those whom they deported to what Soggin (1984:252) calls "the sub-proletariat of the city and the country" (Jer 39:10; 2 Kings 25:12//Jer 52:16 cf.Ezek 33:21-27). The Babylonians, thus:

> ...created a class of small landowners who were not imported from abroad and whose rights were based not on inheritance or purchase, but derived from the intervention of the occupying power; they owed everything to it and therefore were unconditionally faithful (Soggin 1984:252).

Soggin notes that such a policy, of course, created problems for the returning exiles. Soggin's (1984:277) conjecture *vis-a-vis* Nehemiah 5 and the remission of debt also has to do with the land which the exiles lost. The conjecture is that the remission of debt meant that those who currently possessed the land as a result of the Babylonian

policy could keep it.

Those who were deported considered themselves to be the elect remnant announced by the prophets. "They were in fact the ruling class, more educated, and they were also probably those who collected and edited what had been salvaged of the traditions of their people" (Soggin 1984:253). Those left behind are described as the poorest of the land, left to be vinedressers and plowmen (*see* Graham 1984).

Population-deportation policy: Contrary to the Assyrian practice, the Babylonian policy was not to disperse those whom they deported in an attempt to destroy them ethnically and politically. In fact, the deportees were settled in compact groups, especially in the south region of Babylonia (Ezek 1:1ff Jer 29:5; Ez 2:59//Neh 7:61). Gottwald (1985:424) contrasts well the difference between Babylonian and Assyrian colonial practice:

> The Assyrians replaced deported Israelite leaders with colonists from other parts of the empire, thereby deliberately disturbing the previous social and cultural fabric of the region and making it difficult for a homogenous Israelite culture and religion to flourish. By contrast, the Neo-Babylonians followed a less decisive policy with Judah. The leadership of Judah deported in 597 was replaced with a "second team" and, when the latter were deported in 586, yet another attempt was made to form a native administration under Gedaliah. The deportation of 582 may have followed in the wake of Gedaliah's assassination.
>
> There is, in short, no indication that Nebuchadnezzar ever introduced foreign population into Judah. On the other hand, neighboring people were enabled to encroach on the territory of Judah, most strikingly the Edomites.....It is likely that Ammorites and Moabites reclaimed territories in Transjordan and perhaps even west of Jordan, while Samaritans probably pressed into Judah from the north to occupy deserted estates. Nonetheless, there remained a reduced heartland in Judah largely untouched by a residential infusion of foreigners

(Gottwald 1985:424).

7.3.3 THE IMPACT OF BABYLONIAN HEGEMONY

Deportation/Exile: The ideological implications of the exile included: an end to political independence, as well as to the dynasty which had once been promised to exist forever. The people of God no longer enjoyed life in their promised land. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel, aware of the implications, tried to keep alive the hope of restoration to the promised land.

The situation of the people who were not exiled was difficult, in spite of the fact that many received land *via* Babylonian policy. The social and economic structures which had given expression to their culture were simply no longer alive. The temple was destroyed, as well as the ruling house and the state (Lam 1-2; 4-5).

Gedaliah had begun a program of reconstruction "inviting those who had survived the catastrophe and the deportation to repopulate the cities and to resume everyday activities" (Soggin 1984:255). There is a lack of clarity *vis-a-vis* the status of Gedaliah. Was he the Babylonian-chosen governor of an independent province of Judah (*see* 2 Kings 25:22//Jer 39:5) or was he simply a person in charge of Jewish affairs in a major province, the Samaria of the Assyrian empire, to which Judah had been added?

In 582 B.C.E., there was a further deportation from Judah (Jer 52:30). The deportation

was probably connected to the assassination of Gedaliah (Soggin 1984:256). Gedaliah's government, which helped the region towards economic recovery as well as provisional administrative and social structures, did not last long.

The economic and state structures were of course severely damaged by the Babylonian conquest. There were deportations but it must be said, contrary to the impression created by the biblical text, there was life in the land, after the upper class was deported. As Ezekiel 33:24 tells us, there were those living in the ruins of the country. Jeremiah 41:5 mentions a pilgrimage to the temple of Jerusalem by inhabitants of territories of Schechem and Shiloh, i.e. inhabitants of the former northern kingdom. We could suppose that the temple was not completely destroyed and that some form of worship, however minimal, was practised there.

> After all, the interest of Babylon was in destroying Judah as a military base, as a bridge for Egyptian attacks, and therefore in dismantling fortifications; but that clearly also caused the destruction of other buildings whose purpose was not military (Soggin 1984:256).

Deportation meant that the spiritual centre of Jerusalem and Judah was transferred to Babylon and remained there until the exiles returned under Persian sponsorship.

Identifying the deportees: Scholars have tried to provide more or less accurate numbers of those exiled. However, as Smith (1989:31) points out, there are at least three difficulties facing such a calculation. The first is that we do not know if only men were counted. However, given the patriarchal structure of the society, it is seems safe to assume that the numbers recorded in the biblical text should be counted as *men*

only, raising the second difficulty of the size of the families of the *men* who were counted. The third problem is, of course, related to the determination of the size of the population not exiled. By all indications, the majority of the population was left in the land.

To the difficulties just raised, it must be added that the biblical text itself is unclear on the precise numbers (*see* Smith 1989:31). One source (Jer 52:28-30) reports that 4 600 citizens of Judah were deported in three waves (in 597, 586, and 582 B.C.E.). Another source (2 Kings 24:14) claims that 10 000 were deported in 597 B.C.E. alone, but in v.16, list 7 000 "men of valour" and 1 000 artisans - all of these considered "strong and fit for war".

What is relevant, says Smith, is not to question the accuracy of the numbers but to ask whether enough people were exiled to form large exile communities. In answering Smith's question, we must note that the total number of the exiled amounted to probably not more than five percent of the total population of Judah. We must also ask whether the number left in the land were so small that the continued life of Judaism would be necessarily with the exiled group now relocated in Babylon.

The religious life of those not deported: The new colonial administration of Judah, headed by Gedaliah, was obviously a pro-Neo-Babylonian administration. A Judah loyalist group assassinated Gedaliah and, fearing reprisals from the Babylonian

regime, fled Judah. Some settled in the Transjordan, Syria, and Phoenicia while a large party of them fled to Egypt (Gottwald 1985:424). The populace of Jerusalem was decidedly decreased, with a second tier of leadership now also dispersed, leaving the infrastructure of the surviving Palestinian community strained.

We have already noted the Chronistic ideology of an empty land, presenting and describing the land of the ancestors as "enjoying its sabbaths" (2 Chron 36:21). If we accept that only the cream of the population were exiled, a simple calculation would indicate that the vast majority of the population remained in Judah. By implication, life in Judah must have continued in much the same way as before (see above, 7.1 *Methodological Considerations*, pp.220f). In spite of the radical destruction of Jerusalem, Stern (1982:229) has found archaeological evidence to support the claim that life continued in Jerusalem. Noth (1959:296), in a similar way, suggests that the exiles were a mere outpost, while the real nucleus of Israel remained in Palestine and authored the Deuteronomic history (*see* Janssen 1956:17-18).

Thus, those who remained behind, if we accept the Janssen and Noth theories, must have included some educated people - at least a prolific group of writers, as well as a group of zealous Yahwists who interpreted the exile as punishment for Josiah's anti-syncretistic actions. Welch (1935; *see also* Jones 1963) argues that the *zealous Yahwists* are thought to be the ones with whom the returning exiles (under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua) made a covenant (cf.Neh 10:1bff & v.29ff).

From Ezra 4:2, we must assume that the inhabitants of Jerusalem, at least a clearly-defined group (brought by King Esar-haddon of Assyria), were engaged in some form of worship and sacrifice in Jerusalem prior to the arrival of the exiles. Smith (1989:34) says that the reference to King Esar-haddon "would call this passage into question, since this refers to a time preceding even the beginning of the Exile by almost a century." Smith, unfortunately, does not develop his argument.

There is no doubt that the ruined site of the old temple was visited by pilgrims from as far afield as Samaria (Jer 41:4-8). There is uncertainty about the exact type of sacrificial acts performed at the site of the altar at the temple ruins. Smith notes that, even though there are not necessarily any indications of "full animal sacrifice", the important point is that the temple ruins were used for ritual purposes. The book of Lamentations, Psalms 79, 105-6 and Zechariah 7:2-7; 8:18-19 tell us that fasts were proclaimed to commemorate the catastrophic events of Jerusalem's capture and destruction by Babylon.

Gottwald (1985:425) argues that worship "may well have included animal sacrifices presided over by lower orders of priests who had escaped deportation". Jones (1963) argues against Welch's theory of *zealous Yahwists* in Jerusalem. Jones suggests that the theology which emerged in a context of a destroyed Jerusalem can in fact be called an *anti-Temple* or *non-Temple* piety that was *outside of sacrifice*. The logic of Jones' argument is that sacrifice must have ceased in order for this kind of piety to emerge.

While Jones' theory is attractive, it must be said that an anti-temple theology does not necessarily presuppose the absence of a temple. The temple was a symbol of oppression for the poorest of the land in terms of tax extraction and it is conceivable that they, therefore, had an anti-temple theology while having a functioning material-temple-building. In addition, we can say that the exiles had a non-material temple theology or piety. Ezekiel's temple imagery is a case in point. The exiles, unlike those who were not deported, were forced to conceptualise reality in the absence of a physical-material-temple. Our interpretation of the extent to which they dreamed of returning to rebuild a temple which had been badly damaged by the Babylonians depends on the extent to which we ascribe Jewish authorship to the decree of Cyrus. The Persian dispensation certainly created new dreams *vis-a-vis* a rebuilt and functioning temple. There is no doubt that a rebuilt temple meant economic and political control of the region. The returning former Judahite elite were adamant in insisting that only they would build the temple, in consequence of permission from Cyrus. Conflict was bound to arise, as we see especially in Ezra 4-6, as to who had the right to build, and then ultimately, to control the political-economic-ideological center of a post-Babylonian Judah.

It may be instructive to note that the peasants may well not have been interested in the rebuilding of the temple, since it symbolised oppressive economic extraction. Ultimately, it would be the peasants on whose back the economy would be rebuilt. It would be through their sacrificial animals and royal taxation and tribute that a viable

recovery of Judah would depend. Why should they then be interested in a temple-structured economy? Full opposition, not to the temple building itself, but to the ultimate control of the finished product, would be likely to emerge from the elite who had ruled Judah in the absence of the deported Judahite ruling class.

The economic life of those not deported: Graham (1984) amasses textual and archaeological evidence to show the way in which economic activity may have continued in Palestine under Babylonian rule. Graham argues that workers were in the service of authority (2 Chron 26:10; 21 Kings 25:12; Jer 52:16 & Isa 61:5). Archaeological evidence suggests continued agricultural activity in Palestine after the Exile. The extent of produce are, of course, hard to estimate, but it is certain that the poor who had been left behind in the land did continue to make a living. The interesting aspect is that one can assume that, in the absence of a centralised and institutional cult, the peasants were not heavily exploited in terms of tribute and royal tax. Given that Samaria was still the administrative centre of Palestine during the exile, there must have been some taxation, but, without a temple in Jerusalem, the amounts demanded of peasants would not have been as severe. The limited biblical sources force us to speculate in this regard.

The ethnic-cultural-political infrastructure of those not deported: Gottwald argues that those left behind, i.e. the *poor of the land*:

> ...tapped a wealth of local custom and were experienced participants and leaders in village cooperative networks. Thus the ancient village tribalism

> overlaid for centuries, was able to reemerge as the dominant force in organising and preserving Palestinian Jewish identity throughout the exile, no matter how much hampered by the imposition of Neo-Babylonian domination (Gottwald 1985:425) .

While Gottwald's hypothesis is plausible, it must remain a conjecture. We have no evidence to support such a position. However, his point is in line with our observations as to who would benefit most from a rebuilt temple. It would certainly not be the peasants, and one would expect a certain level of opposition to the rebuilding of the temple to come from the peasant classes. However, as we have noted above, the text lumps together all opposition forces and presents these as a formidable and united front which the exiles eventually are able to overthrow, by means of securing imperial decrees in their favour.

Social conditions of life in Babylonian exile: The immediate historical consciousness of the returning exiles must have been the experience of exile. After surveying various theories and approaches in terms of describing the social conditions facing the exiles in Babylon, Smith (1989:41) concludes that "we are unable to make definite conclusions about exilic existence apart from the biblical text itself". We are able to describe certain of the exilic social patterns only when we reach the E-N literature, since it is here that the exiles are confronted by the people in the land, i.e. *those who were not deported and dispersed.* The ideological clash between the returning exiles and the people of the land helps us better understand the social patterns which seem to have guided exilic life.

Smith creatively subjects the biblical material to a functionalist sociological reading so as to better understand life in exile. Smith uses contemporary sociological groups of survival as case studies and, thus, as hermeneutical grids through which he filters the biblical data. The three studies he identifies trace the religious responses to Apartheid in South African Bantustans, to African-American slavery and to Japanese-American internment during World War II. His motivation and theory he states very clearly:

> In many details, obviously, the cases are not comparable to the Babylonian Exile of the biblical texts. But on other points they are strikingly similar. The success of this approach, however, is not the proof that a Jewish pattern of response in the sixth century B.C.E. is "just like," for instance, the Japanese-American response to internment in the twentieth century, but rather, the question is whether a particular biblical exegetical hypothesis suggested by the analogy is in itself true (Smith 1989:69-70).

A fundamental presupposition of Smith's analysis is that the primary concern of the exilic community was social survival. The Babylonian exile was indeed a crisis (Smith 1989:49) and it is only natural "that self-preservation was a major concern". The social situation facing the exiles from the moment of their deportation must have included questions around mechanisms of survival in a new social context. Smith outlines four such mechanisms which the exiles used to survive the crisis of exile. The first is structural adaptation (Smith 1989:93-126). In this context Smith talks about the *Bet-abot* (house of the fathers) issue. The second survival mechanism involves the clear definition of not only the leaders of the exiled community but also the strategies of survival (Smith 1989:127-138). It is in such a context that the ideological clash between Jeremiah and Hananiah must be analysed (*see* Mottu 1993). The third means

of survival is related to ritual behaviour (Smith 1989:139-145). The point is made that it was important to protect the social boundaries of the fragile community in exile. As a result, purity regulations became a vital part of the character of this community. The fourth survival strategy emerges in the form of pious and clever heroes who are able to penetrate the ranks of the ruling class (Smith 1989:153-178). Understandably, the mechanisms of survival became such an ingrained part of the life of the Jews in exile that, on their return to Judah, they were unable to shed their coping strategies (Smith 1989:179-200).

The pressing questions are: Why should they have changed their identity on their return to the land? What would be the political and economic implications of becoming more inclusive and shedding the survival form of social identity? Was there enough ground for cooperation and reconciliation between the two competing groups? We return to these questions below.

Summary: Internally, the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem witnessed the end of the institutional-ideological infrastructure of the state of Judah. Judah shifted from being autonomous to being a mere colony of Babylon. Externally, in terms of the impact of the exile, we in one sense, have to wait for the return of the deported ex-officials to hypothesise on the structure of their lives in Babylonia and the probable impact of Babylonian life and politics on their consciousness.

7.4 PERSIAN HEGEMONY IN THE ANE

7.4.1 A SOCIO-HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

E-N identifies important Persian kings: The explicit socio-political axis around which the E-N text revolves is the reigns of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes (Ez 6:14; Neh 2:1), the rulers to whom the compilers finally give all of the credit for the reinstatement of the position of privilege and power of the returning ex-ruling elite of Judah and their descendants. Cambyses II evidently does not play a major role as far as the compilers of the E-N narrative are concerned, at least not explicitly. Disregard for Cambyses II is understandable if one considers that, as far as the returning elite was concerned, it is under Cyrus that the initial repatriation process is started; it is under Darius that the temple rebuilding programme is finally allowed to resume and be completed and under Artaxerxes (I and/or III?) that the missions of Ezra and Nehemiah take place. The E-N literature premises each of the three phases of national reconstruction on an imperial decree. There is no record indicating that Cambyses II issued a decree, which probably explains his absence from the E-N literature and the national consciousness in the province Beyond the River.

Persian history is adequately described and discussed (Cook 1983, 1985; Ackroyd 1968, 1979; Dandemaev 1989) and needs no repetition here, except for a very broad orientation. While the E-N text is particularly concerned with life in Judah, we cannot fully appreciate the dynamics of the text without reference to the wider political-economic axis of Persian hegemony.

A colonial paradigm shift: Persian hegemony of the ANE (539-332 B.C.E.), as inaugurated by Cyrus the Great, was premised on a colonial policy which included resettling exiles in their homelands, reconstructing temples, and, in general, presenting himself to the conquered as a liberator (*see* Cyrus Cylinder, cf.Stern 1984:70). His lenient policy was in stark contrast to Assyrian and Babylonian hegemony which had been based on radical population displacement through large-scale deportations and on a reign of fear. The implications of Persian hegemonic strategy were to have a profound impact on the restructuring of Judah during the period. The E-N text is a witness to the impact of Persian hegemony on the religio-cultural consciousness of the returning elite. The E-N text is very clear and explicit about the role of the Persian authorities in the refounding of the nation-state Judah.

Stability of the new empire as a priority: While the decree of Cyrus (539/8 B.C.E.) must be seen as a major paradigm shift in colonial hegemony, it is unlikely that vast numbers of exiles returned to their homelands (Soggin 1984:266). Especially Judahites, who would have needed to travel great distances through rather unstable and dangerous areas (*see* Ez 8:22 cf.Neh 2:7), are likely to have remained in the land of exile. We need to remember that Cyrus inherited a very unstable organisation from the Babylonian kingdom, with the result that his reign was preoccupied with military expeditions to consolidate his empire. Darius faced similar instability . It is within the context of an unstable empire that we need to view the tenacity of the various waves of returnees to Judah.

We also need to remember that while the biblical texts present Cyrus as being directly inspired by Yahweh (cf.Isa 45:1-7), the political reality is that Cyrus had no special sympathy for any foreign religion.

> He acted with respect to the Yahwist cult as he had acted with respect to the Babylonian temples...while it [Cyrus Edict] was a decisive episode for the Judeans themselves, at the same time it was a common and banal event for the Persian political establishment. It is probable that, in doing this, Cyrus had political objectives in mind, probably already anticipating an expedition against Egypt, which was located on the other side of Judea" (Briant 1992:238; cf.Ackroyd 1969).

Egypt was a particularly troublesome area. The death of Cyrus in 530 B.C.E., left his son, Cambyses II, the task of consolidating the geopolitical space of the empire. Cambyses' main contribution was the conquest of Egypt and its annexation into the Acheamenid Empire in 525 B.C.E. (Stern 1984:71).

The contribution of Cyrus and his son, Cambyses II: The conquests of Cyrus and Cambyses set the geopolitical and administrative parameters of Persian hegemony.

> By 525 B.C., the Persians had no more neighbors in the Middle East: the ancient kingdoms of Media, Lydia, Babylonia, and Egypt had been transformed into satrapies administered by the Persians (Briant 1992:238).

Both Cyrus and his son "coopted" the religio-cultural traditions of the colonised as a means of stabilising the young Persian empire. In this regard Cyrus "Babylonized" himself, while Cambyses "Pharoanized" himself in Egypt. No doubt the policy adopted by Cyrus and his son, Cambyses II, constituted the basis for reorganising and stabilising a former Babylonian kingdom premised on population displacement and a disregard for indigenous religio-cultural practices.

Administrative reorganisation under Darius I: The death of Cambyses was accompanied by a fierce power struggle for the throne, since no one was nominated as successor. Darius I eventually came to power. It is unclear whether or not Darius I was, in fact, a member of the royal family. While Stern (1984) holds the view that Darius I was, in fact, of royal descent, Briant (1992) raises some serious questions which have to be considered before making a decision. It may have been precisely the questionable lineage of Darius which set off widespread rebellions throughout the vast empire (Stern 1984:71). Darius eventually managed to pacify the kingdom and, then, embarked on a programme of consolidation. The conquests of Cyrus and his son, Cambyses II, left the kingdom somewhat destabilised; before Darius' famous administrative reorganisation of the kingdom, he also needed to engage in military expeditions to secure and consolidate the kingdom, geopolitically. A major contribution of Darius I to the empire was that he extended the borders of the kingdom. During his reign, he was primarily concerned with waging wars mainly on the "western border, in Anatolia and Greece" (Stern 1984:71). The rebellion of the Greek cities of Anatolia and Cyprus in 499 B.C.E., although put down harshly by Darius, raised a serious ongoing concern for Persia. So persistent was the Greek challenge, that in 490 B.C.E., Greece defeated the Persians - the first serious defeat of the Persians - in the battle of Marathon. Darius, although wanting to respond to the defeat, was preoccupied with another threat, this time from Egypt (led by Khabasha), in 486 B.C.E. Darius died in preparation for a campaign against Egypt.

The reigns of Cyrus and Cambyses II were characterised by a preoccupation with consolidating the geopolitical boundaries of the kingdom. While the task was, of necessity, a concern of Darius, his reign is more safely characterised as a consolidation of the empire administratively. A lack of evidence has caused scholars to think that during the reigns of Cyrus and Cambyses no real change occurred in the social and administrative structure of Persian colonies (*see* Hoglund 1989). It was immediately after Darius's ascension to the throne and his victory of 520 B.C.E., in Elam, that he reorganised the empire.

Darius divided the geopolitical space controlled by Persia into 20 large satrapies (i.e., provincial governments) to represent the vastness of the empire. Each satrapy (i.e., a region/province) was ruled by a Persian-appointed satrap (i.e., a governor). Each satrapy usually represented the former boundaries of past kingdoms: military commanders assumed responsibility for imperial forces stationed in the conquered territories (Hoglund 1989:29). Hoglund notes that an intricate network of officials emerged, with some reporting directly to the Persian capital and others via their immediate supervisor, the governor.

While the system of tribute existed under Cyrus, Cambyses and Bardiya already, Darius was the one to unify and systematize the administrative practices. The people were reunited from within the large governmental provinces and made to pay a tribute each year. Each satrapy was given to a high Persian aristocrat, aided by administrators.

The satrap could call upon garrison and occupation troops. The satrapy had to pay its tribute each year to the Persian king, who deposited it in the stores and treasurers of the empire. "The size of the stocks of precious metals later found by Alexander the Great is an indication of the viability of the system" (Briant 1992:239).

Briant (1992:238) notes that in order to control the provinces more effectively, large numbers of native Persians were installed and were given sizeable plots of land along with the obligation of leading their cavalry troops as requisitioned by the governor. Within the province, the local peoples, dynasties and other recognised communities continued to enjoy a certain degree of autonomy.

7.4.2 THE POLITICAL-ECONOMY OF JUDAH

Socio-cultural realignments in Judah: The rise of the Persian regime as the new colonial power of the ANE meant a fundamental change in the nature of power relations, according to the dominant theory of socio-cultural arrangements in the Persian era. It is assumed that the pattern of social relations underwent profound change, especially in Judah.

A critical question to ask is, of course, a profound change for whom; for the entire fabric of society or for just a select few? The point of view held here is that the change in the nature of power relations was confined to the upper class. Babylonian deportation policy was to deport the ruling class of society. Persia repatriated the

former ruling elites to their former homelands and, as was the case with Judah, they returned home with the implicit assumption that they would resume their former positions of leadership and land ownership. If we accept Lenski's theory that the ruling elite in an agrarian society comprised not more than between five and seven percent of the population, then the only ones to feel the full impact of any administrative colonial change would have been the governing elite. The majority of the population, who were peasants, can be assumed to have maintained traditional socio-cultural patterns of organisation.

However, it is very difficult to tell exactly what was the pattern of social relations which governed the vast majority of remaining Judahites during the period of the exile. Gottwald seems to think that in the absence of the ruling class (deported by the Babylonians) the peasants reorganised themselves in terms of the traditional communitarian patterns of social organisation. The evidence, if any, is rather meagre. What is, of course, interesting, is that there is evidence, in E-N, of the administrators of the former Northern Kingdom (Samaria) feeling the freedom to exert their authority on the developments in the South. In fact, the level of opposition which the text witnesses to must be located in the upper levels of society. The opposition has direct access to Persia and is strong enough to bring the rebuilding programme to a halt. It is, therefore, likely that in the absence of a ruling elite in the South, after the destruction of Jerusalem (587 B.C.E.) and the deportation of its upper class, the former Assyrian province of Sàmaria, i.e. the North, reexerted its authority over the South. They would

certainly have been allowed to do so, since, in the early phases of Persian rule of the ANE, the socio-political patterns set up by the Babylonians in the province Beyond the River, were probably left intact.

It is, of course, unclear as to exactly when Judah became an independent administrative unit under Persian tutelage, but the uncertainty should not take our attention away from the fact that a northern elite probably reexerted its authority over Judah. It is, therefore, understandable that when the *original* or *legitimate* ruling elite returned to Judah, the Northerners would have needed to revise the basis of their control over the southern part of the province Beyond the River. The voices appealing in E-N for inclusion as *Jews*, i.e. as citizens of the *Tempel-Gemeinde,* are the voices of a small upper-class minority and not the majority of under-class of peasants in Judah. The voice of the peasant class is unimportant and to some extent silenced (except for Neh 5:1f) as an ideological battle rages between two ruling elites, both competing for the legitimacy from Persia to control the South, Judah.

Why did control over the South concern the Northerners? What would be the advantage of control of the southern region? The theory proposed here is that the temple building project in the South was a threat, firstly, to the economic potential of the North and, secondly, to the administrative-political status of the north. There were probably fears that a Persian sponsored restructuring of the South implied a later and certain expansion of power to incorporate the North, a legitimate fear, of course, if

Persia were not showing the same kind of support for the consolidation of the North.

Blenkinsopp (1991b) shows rather convincingly that temples were the primary centres for tax and tribute collection, i.e. the political-economic hub of the Persian exchequer. A Persian-sponsored temple presupposed revenue for Persia through taxation and tribute and a shift in the location of the seat of political power in the province Beyond the River. The old rivalries between South and North were once again being played out in the context of Persian hegemony. The Northerners, thus, faced the risk of losing valuable revenue as well as the status of leadership and control over the peasant masses in Judah. The South faced the prospect of ultimately gaining control of the entire region. This is not a far-fetched conclusion when one considers that the ultimate geopolitical vision of Ezra-Nehemiah literature incorporates the northern borders. Stern (1984) shows that the ruling elite of the South had imperial-type visions of the extent of the geographical borders of their hegemony. The boundaries which the resettlement list describes do not match with the reality of those in the Persian period, but rather reflect the desire of the southern elite for control over an Israel whose borders were drawn in the united-monarchy period. It is therefore not unreasonable to suppose that the northern elite, who must have enjoyed some control of the South in the absence of a southern ruling elite, faced the possibility of not only losing control over the South but, in fact, losing economic and political control of the entire province Beyond the River. This, indeed, was the implication of Persian support for the returning former elite of the South.

One can argue that the Persian support for the returning southerners was confined to the district of Judah alone, and that the neighbouring areas had their own systems of accountability to Persia. In other words, as Bedford (1991:156) states, we cannot be too sure about the extent of the administrative powers granted to the returning elite of the South. It does seem rather narrow, however, to confine the power struggles and ideological battle to the immediate district of Judah.

It is interesting that, in the economic context of Judah, there is a major area of reform reported under Nehemiah's governorship. The precise date of the report, is, on one level, unimportant. What matters for our purposes is the pattern of social relations in the context of Judah. In Neh 5:1f., we read of the economic exploitation of the *people* by their own kindred, in the context of heavy taxation. Nehemiah's reaction clarifies that it is the *nobles and officials* (Neh 5:7) who are exploiting the *people* (presumably the peasantry impoverished because of the famine).

Another interesting and rather ironic turn of events is recorded in the decree of Darius (Ez 6) which demands that the North actually pay for the rebuilding costs taking place in the South. It is as if the text were poking fun at the opposition which had initially succeeded in bringing the building programme to a halt for a few years. It can only have been a major source of irritation to be forced to finance the erection of the very institution, i.e, a temple in the South, which may undermine the economic and political power base of the northern elite, the very ones having to facilitate the funding

of the enterprise.

It is not unrealistic to imagine the following scenario of structural shifts. The North was conquered by Assyria and made into an Assyrian province. We know that as an Assyrian province, the North reduced the South to vassal status. By the time the South was invaded by Babylon (598 B.C.E.) and Jerusalem destroyed (587 B.C.E.), the North had had a long history of colonial domination and adaptation (*see* discussion above, concerning, Assyrian deportation strategy), but, more importantly, had remained intact during the Babylonian epoch. We, therefore, must assume that the North had the infrastructure to extend its hegemonic tentacles to the South.

With the return of the South's former ruling elite, the northern elite was forced to retreat, but not without a struggle, as we see from Ezra 1-6. The opposition narratives recorded, especially, in Ezra 4-5, are elite-oriented opposition narratives. The strategies employed by both sides of the struggle presuppose access to the highest levels of colonial power - in fact, direct access to the Persian court. It is in such a context that the imperial dispatches and memoranda become crucial documents since these ultimately decide which ruling elite is to be granted the *legitimate* power to dominate and control the peasantry.

Summary: The structural changes and shifts facilitated by the Persian regime only greatly affected the ruling elites who engaged in fierce battle for control over the

productive forces of the South.

7.5 CONCLUSION

In trying to account for the material conditions of the E-N text, the above analysis has shown the extent to which Judah, as a geopolitical space, has been used as a 'political football', by various colonial regimes. Even before the onset of the colonial era, Judah had occupied a special place in terms of Israelite history and identity being, among others, the location of the first revered temple. The destruction of the temple signified, at least for the ruling class, the final demise of Israelite identity.

Understandably, the subsequent repatriation of the Judahites deported to Babylon by Nebuchadrezzar signalled a new era for both the minority of deportees as well as for the majority of the population who were not deported. As indicated above, repatriation of the Golah meant the reestablishment of their ruling powers not only in Jerusalem-Judah, but indeed in the entire province Beyond the River.

There is no doubt that the guarantee of Persian sponsorship for the reconstruction programme of the Golah, by way of official imperial decrees, created the conditions whereby the large majority of the people (i.e., the people of the land) became ideological dependants on the Golah. The reconstruction of the second temple, premised almost exclusively on Persian economic support, created the conditions conducive for what might be termed *exclusionary politics*. The Golah could and did

exclude the people of the land from meaningfully participating in the reconstruction not only of the physical temple structure, but also exclusion in terms of redeveloping a national religio-cultural identity in the wake of the cultural humiliation through Babylonian banishment.

In the E-N literature, the importance attached to the declaration of imperial decrees, ultimately securing the rights and privileges of the Golah, is therefore directly tied to the patronage of Persia. The potential of economic control of the region (including Samaria, the former Northern Israel) , held out by a completed temple in the South, cannot be overlooked as a major motivating factor for the protectionistic kind of political outlook of the Judah-oriented Golah.

The above analysis places one in a better position to appreciate the social system and practices undergirding the E-N text. No doubt, E-N is a biased reflection on the events which transpired in the process of the reconstruction of Palestine, with Jerusalem-Judah as its exclusive spiritual-ideological core. Nevertheless, a thorough knowledge of the material conditions of the text enables the interpreter to appreciate and delineate more clearly the struggles inherent in the E-N text.

CHAPTER 8

IMPERIAL DECREES AND EZRA-NEHEMIAH: The nexus of politics, power, ideology and literary production

Three major conclusions: Three major conclusions emerge from this study. One is that *a literary-ideological mode of reading the biblical text moves E-N studies beyond the methodological impasse which presently characterises it.* This conclusion is based on the analyses made in the first three chapters of this study. Chapter 1 shows how scholars have been preoccupied with attempts to account for the compositional history of E-N basing such proposals on a comparison of the linguistic and stylistic features of the book of Chronicles with that of E-N. Such a comparison is based on the assumption that the Chronicler was also the author of E-N. The review of research *vis-a-vis* imperial decrees in E-N reveals a similar preoccupation with linguistic and stylistic matters, in effect amounting to a decision whether or not the decrees are authentic or falsifications. Chapter 1 then, also clearly demonstrates how the imperial decrees are not considered to play any significant role in the formation and interpretation of the E-N literature.

The narrow literary concerns (i.e. deciding whether the decrees are forgeries or genuine) in E-N are complemented by a preoccupation with matters historical. The past century of E-N research has witnessed a preoccupation with the historical-chronological reliability and accuracy of the E-N literature. Simply stated, E-N studies have suffered under the imposition of twentieth century historiographical assumptions

and criteria - the result being that very few questions have been raised concerning the important role of the decrees and, more generally, the ideological function and character of the E-N literature as a whole.

In both instances, that is, concerning both the compositional history of E-N as well as the analysis of the literary quality of the decrees, there is a methodological impasse. In both instances, the application of the various aspects of the historical-critical method (e.g. textual criticism, form criticism, source criticism) has yielded contradictory conclusions. Of course, evidence of contradictory results does not, itself, constitute a methodological impasse. Rather, the interpretive methods appropriated have exhausted their exegetical and interpretive value, leaving the debate in a deadlock.

The methodological impasse characterising E-N studies hints that we should perhaps pose a different set of questions to the text. This is precisely what motivates the analysis in Chapter 2 & 3, where a literary-ideological mode of reading is proposed as a way out of the methodological deadlock. Chapter 3, in particular, makes explicit the kinds of questions for which a literary-ideological paradigm seeks answers; answers relative to issues of politics, power, ideology, and how these impact the production and interpretation of the E-N literature. The literary-ideological mode of reading the biblical text thus seeks to make explicit the political-ideological and religio-cultural agenda(s) of a text in a way that the text itself is unable to do.

The second major finding of this study is that *the imperial decrees function as the organising centre for the E-N literature*. Through applying the methodological criteria of a literary-ideological paradigm, the structural character of the E-N text is exposed in terms of its use of the imperial decrees to create narrative cohesion. The role of the decree on a literary-structural level is demonstrated in Chapter 4. Here, this study makes explicit how that E-N is best conceived as a text whose narrative logic is fundamentally undergirded by the imperial decrees it contains. Chapter 4 also makes explicit the tri-partite historical memory of E-N (i.e. three moments/phases considered important in the process of the reconstruction of Jerusalem-Judah during the Second Temple period). Each of the three moments have a specific political-economic context. Furthermore, each of the moments frozen in the memory of the compilers receives its historical, literary and ideological orientation from an imperial decree. For example, the [S-Z] literary unit (Ezra 1-6), where the dominant motif is the rebuilding the temple, is dependent upon the decree of Darius, the decree which, ultimately, facilitates the completion of the temple building project. The same is demonstrated for the [E] literary unit (Ezra 7-10) and the [N] literary unit (Nehemiah 1-13), each reflecting a particular moment in the process of reconstruction and development in early Second Temple Palestine.

The third major finding of this study follows logically; *the decoding of the political and conflict discourse in E-N cannot be done without reference to the imperial decrees*. Chapter 5 examines the various terms used to describe the nature of the

political correspondence which was exchanged between the Persian court and the province Beyond the River, demonstrating the extent to which the imperial decrees are *spiritualised* by being granted religio-cultural significance by the Golah, who dominate the Persian-sponsored reconstruction of Jerusalem-Judah. Chapter 6 then, examines the conflict discourse inherent in E-N, thereby demonstrating the extent to which the imperial decrees provide the parameters for conflict resolution within the context of political and social reconstruction in early Second Temple Palestine.

An appreciation for the role of the imperial decrees in E-N cannot be developed without a grasp of the material conditions undergirding the text. The attempt to make explicit the material conditions of E-N is crucial in understanding the struggles signified by the text. Thus, Chapter 7, tries to account for the production of ideas, concepts and consciousness in E-N, in terms of the history that has produced it. To this end, chapter seven outlines the impact of Ancient Near Eastern colonial regimes such as Assyrian and Babylonian, on the life of Israel. It is crucial to have some appreciation of Israel's experience of colonial domination, since this experience forms the immediate ideological and political background to the exclusionary politics of the Golah in Jerusalem-Judah, within the broader context of Persian colonialism. The analysis proposed in chapter seven, therefore, attempts to reconstruct the social history of Israel during its life as a political pawn on the chess board of imperial Ancient Near Eastern colonial empires such as Assyria, Babylon and Persia.

Implications: The primary thread which is consistently woven through the fabric of this study, providing its methodological and conceptual cohesion, is the claim that the imperial decrees of Persia, as reflected in E-N, provide **the** interpretive parameters for any analysis of E-N which seeks to appreciate the socio-political, socio-economic and religio-cultural dynamics during the period of reconstruction in early Second Temple Palestine. This study, by developing and using an alternative methodological paradigm (i.e. a literary-ideological) for E-N studies, demonstrates the centrality of the imperial decrees *vis-a-vis* the structural framework of the E-N narrative, and consequently the crucial role of the decrees in facilitating the reconstruction of Jerusalem-Judah in the aftermath of the Babylonian destruction. More specifically, this study demonstrates the centrality of the decrees in facilitating the completion of the second temple, the redefinition of cultural and geopolitical boundaries in Palestine, as well as indirectly facilitating the restructuring of the economy through Nehemiah's reforms. It is suggested, here, that any reading of the E-N narrative which chooses not to filter the various reconstruction and development programmes of E-N through the hermeneutical grid of the imperial decrees will fail to recognise the interlocking functions of the political decrees within the religio-cultural context of the E-N literature. The extent to which the political decrees and religious orientation of the E-N literature interact with each other is best illustrated by a discussion which spells out the implications of the three major conclusions of this study using the categories of politics, power, ideology and literary production.

On the *political* level the imperial decrees provide the documentary evidence for the legitimacy of the Golah, to return and again rule in the land, post-Babylonian Palestine. There are essentially two ways in which the Babylonian destruction of the temple can be interpreted and these are largely dependent on the socio-cultural perspective from which the analysis is undertaken. On the one hand, the banishment to Babylon of the Judahite upper class is positively interpreted by the Golah. The experience of exile is redefined as one of religious refinement, a time to consolidate the faith. On the other hand, those who suffered during the pre-Babylonian destruction of Judah, as a consequence of the exploitative economic policies orchestrated by the Judahite ruling class, via the temple economy, interpret the banishment and deportation as appropriate punishment for an apostate and exploitative Judahite ruling class. The prophetic critique of Amos, i.e. his indictment of those wealthy citizens who exploit the poor, provides the paradigm for such an interpretation.

The imperial decrees of Persia, especially the landmark decree of Cyrus, no doubt facilitated the return to the land of the formerly deported and discredited Judahite upper class. The repatriation of the former upper class Judahites could only promise radical conflict with the lower classes (i.e. people of the land) - conflict which was neutralised by the Golah on a political level through being able to produce political documentation (i.e. imperial decrees) legitimising their return to the land and their return to a position of power, and ensuring lower class quietism.

On the level of *power,* especially economic and military, the imperial decrees provide the Golah with the appropriate paradigm which enshrines the rights and privileges of a deported and discredited elite. Furthermore, the imperial decrees ensure that the recreation and reinstatement of the Golah enjoy the full protection of the law of Persia, which include the option to use Persian military power to enforce the recreated privileges. In other words, the imposition of the ruling powers of the Golah was dependent on the extent to which the Golah could call on Persian military intervention. While Ezra does not choose to use the military option, either as protection for the return journey or his appointment to a position of power, he nevertheless had access to such power. Nehemiah, on the other hand, unashamedly uses the military force made available to him by the king. Thus, the imperial decrees of Cyrus (Ez 1:2-4 cf.Ez 6:3-5) and Darius (Ez 6:6-12), create and protect the status and power of a *Persian-sanctioned* Golah leadership, a leadership which facilitates and dictates the process of reconstruction in the early Second Temple period.

On the level of *ideology* the imperial decrees provide the hermeneutical framework for the standardisation of the *theological* interpretations, decisions and pronouncements of the returning elite over against what might justifiably be called the *resistance theology* of the lower class. Put differently, the imperial decrees of Persia provide the Golah with the ideological weapons of struggle to be used against their opposition. The Golah not only possessed the political documentation which guaranteed the necessary military and economic power to implement their

reconstruction programme, but they also enjoyed the ideological support of Persia in terms of the kind of *biblical* interpretation considered acceptable not only to the Golah, but also to the Persian regime. This is most clearly illustrated by the decree of Artaxerxes to Ezra, where Ezra is instructed to implement, in terms of his interpretation, the law of God and that of the Persian court. It is at this point that the ideological collusion of the E-N text with the reigning ideology of the Persian colonial regime comes into focus. In such a context, the imperial decrees provide the returning elite (Golah) with a colonial-ideological basis for developing a Second Temple *theology of national reconstruction* - a theology to which the E-N literature gives expression.

Lastly, on the level of *literary production,* the imperial decrees empower the Golah to control the literary mode of production in early Second Temple Palestine, and indeed beyond. This meant that the Golah had the power and legitimacy to determine the content of the narrative which was to preserve the events of this period of reconstruction. Furthermore, such empowerment meant that the nature of the literary presence of the opposition (i.e., people of the land) in the narrative, depended exclusively on the extent to which such a presence served the political-ideological and religio-cultural interest of the Golah. This study has shown how reference to the forces of opposition serves only to heighten the success of the Golah as they try to reconstruct Jerusalem-Judah from the ashes of colonial disaster. Thus, the opposition forces in E-N are included on an index of negativity. The result of such a narrative

strategy in the context of the exclusionary politics of the Golah, is that the opposition becomes synonymous with a kind of *anti-God* movement. Thus, the Golah, by means of the imperial decrees, enjoy the control over the means of literary production in that particular society. The Golah, therefore, determine the way in which reality during the early Second Temple period is to be perceived. It is only a literary-ideological mode of reading that is able to penetrate this dimension of ideology in the text.

Consequently, the perspective of the opposition is written out of the history of Second Temple Jewry. This is clearly demonstrated by the denial to some Jews of the right to be classified as Jews and thereby be a part of the reconstruction movement. The E-N narrative is explicit about the necessity of a pedigree of Babylonian exile and/or evidence of complete separation from the abominations of the peoples of the land. Jewishness was thus defined in terms of being separated from all foreigners and in the ability to prove a Babylonian-exilic genealogy. While the narrative describing this process of cultural redefinition mentions the opposition, it does so with the clear intent to justify the exclusion of these (which in effect were also Jews) from mainstream Jewish identity. The marginalisation of the opposition as reflected in the narrative must not be seen solely as a narrative motif, but rather as an ideological by-product of the separatist consciousness which permeated the ruling class of Jerusalem-Judah. It is at this level that political ideology infiltrates the religious discourse in a way that the E-N text is not able to be aware of. In this way it becomes clear how that the production of ideas, concepts and consciousness is inextricably interwoven with

the material intercourse of the restored Golah.

Also on the level of literary production, the imperial decrees provide the structural framework for the tri-partite narrative design E-N. The strategic location of the decrees facilitates a reading of the E-N narrative as a text imbued with the literary status and privilege of being read as the *only* official chronicle and interpretation of the events surrounding the formation of a new Israel in the early Second Temple period.

The E-N text is generally perceived, not as a political manifesto, but rather as a religious text. By implication, the political content of the text is assumed to serve the religious interests and concerns of the Golah. Thus, the imperial import is spiritualised which then makes the literary production of the decrees within the context of a religio-cultural text such as E-N, acceptable to both a religious ruling elite as well as the religiously-dominated majority. A clear example of this is the legitimisation of Cyrus in terms of cultural traditions revered by both the Golah and those whom the Golah exclude and subsequently dominate. Cyrus is presented as someone whose spirit YHWH had stirred, thereby inspiring Cyrus to make a decree which granted permission for banished Jews to return to the land of their ancestors.

The point has already been made that the E-N text creatively weaves together various sources in order to present a coherent account of the process of reconstruction and

restoration in the province Beyond the River. However, in the light of the above comments concerning the ideological collusion of the text with the political-colonial agenda of Persia, is it not unjustifiable to consider E-N as a pro-Persian political manifesto couched in a religio-cultural discourse. In other words, the literary production of E-N can be interpreted as being a religious text with a political agenda. There is no doubt that the religious interpretation of the past history of Israel is incredibly biased in favour of an exclusivist Golah perspective. The point being made here is, that as a text, E-N is sufficiently religious to justify the ruling class interests of the Golah. At the same time it is sufficiently powerful on a political, military and economic level to legitimise the ideology of exclusion and subservience of all non-Golah inhabitants of Judah-Jerusalem, indeed broader Palestine. It is therefore crucial for the ruling class to be able to present their programme of reconstruction as that which God intends for the region in the hope that the excluded majority would interpret the history of Israel in a similar manner. It is that perspective which characterises the literature we today know as E-N.

Refocusing E-N research toward an appreciation for the centrality of the decrees thus brings into focus, rather sharply, the symbiotic relationship between official Persian colonial documents on the one hand, and a religio-cultural text such as E-N, on the other. This study demonstrates that there exists a dialectical relationship between the imperial decrees and the E-N text in which it is set. These literary productions (i.e. imperial decrees and the E-N text) reflect a mutual dependency on one another. The

E-N text lends religio-cultural (theological!) legitimacy to the political decrees of the colonial empire, Persia, while the imperial decrees in turn provide political, military and economic authority and legitimacy to the Golah-led reconstruction of post-Babylonian Palestine. It is not necessary to speculate concerning the independent value of either of these documents since they are inextricably woven together to form the E-N narrative. Thus, the unique combination of these two literature forms produce a narrative complex which not only describes the reconstruction of a particular region within the Persia empire, but also exposes the ideological collusion of the religio-cultural interests of the E-N text with that of Persian colonial ideology. In this sense, the creatively compiled literary production, E-N, confirms the hypotheses which this study set out to test, namely:

1. *The literary structure of the E-N text signifies the centrality of the imperial (Persian) decrees explicitly referred to in the E-N text.*

2. *The dominant ideological agenda of the E-N text is a reflection and an extension of Persian hegemony in the province Beyond the River which included Judah and Jerusalem.*

3. *The religio-cultural discourse of E-N reflects a convergence of ideological interests; that of the returning Jews (Golah) to Palestine and that of the Persian regime who facilitated such a return of Jews to Palestine. On the one hand the returning Jews (former deportees) were solely interested in reestablishing their religious and cultural hegemony in Jerusalem-Judah. On the other hand, the Persian imperial regime could not be disinterested in matters such as the political stability of Palestine, one of its most strategically located colonial provinces.*

4. *The returning exiles would have experienced much greater difficulty to resettle and reassert their authority in Judah without the political and economic support of Persia as well as the ideological legitimation which Persia granted in the form of imperial decrees.*

This study has provided sufficient evidence to substantiate each hypothesis listed above. Any future exegetical analysis which seeks to make explicit the ideological and religio-cultural agenda of E-N, can only benefit from taking into account the crucial role of the imperial decrees in the formation and interpretation of the E-N literature.

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