Texts, Contexts and Readings in Postexilic Literature

Edited by
LOUIS JONKER

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Explorations into Historiography and Identity Negotiation in Hebrew Bible and Related Texts

Edited by
Louis Jonker

Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

This volume represents the culmination of a research project on "Historiography and Identity Negotiation in Persian Period Biblical Literature", which was conducted during 2009 and 2010. The project originated from my own research on the literature of this period, particularly the books of Chronicles. In previous research I employed insights from social identity theory as hermeneutical lens for interpreting the biblical historiographical literature of the late Persian era in Ancient Israel. This hermeneutical approach, as well as my growing insight into the role of historiography in identity negotiation processes in times of socio-political and socio-religious change, confirmed the necessity for interdisciplinary studies in order to explore this vast field. I therefore embarked on a journey to involve other scholars from my own field of specialisation (that is, biblical studies), together with specialists in philosophy of history, social psychology, ancient Persian historiography and Persian period archaeology in the project. I also drew in South African biblical scholars who deliberately interact with their own (South) African post-apartheid contexts in their reading of these biblical historiographies.

The interdisciplinary interaction culminated in a three-day workshop, which was held at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS) during August 2010. Participants were invited to present a specific perspective on the relationship between historiography and identity negotiation from their own fields of specialisation. This workshop led to some in-depth explorations into texts and intertexts from Persian (and Hellenistic) period Israel, as well as the historical and material contexts of the time. Additionally, some readings of Persian-period biblical historiographies from contemporary contexts were offered, and methods for approaching this multifaceted field were explored. A formal response to each paper, as well as general discussions, created a fertile environment for taking some first steps in the direction of interdisciplinarity. The responses and discussions also served the valuable role of peer reviewing, which contributed to further refinement of the contributions before publication in this volume.

The explorations offered in this volume are intended to extend the interdisciplinary interactions of the limited workshop to a wider audience. Although other recently published volumes also head in the direction of taking identity negotiation as the hermeneutical lens for an investigation of Persian-

period Judah, this volume particularly aims to facilitate an interdisciplinary exploration of the field of study.

This project and the present volume would not have been possible if colleagues in my own and related fields had not been willing to contribute their time and energy to this collective endeavour. I therefore thank all my fellow Stellenbosch colleagues who participated in the workshop, either as presenters of papers, or as respondents and valuable discussion partners. I furthermore pay tribute to colleagues from other South African institutions who also participated in the project. My greatest appreciation, however, goes to four international colleagues and friends who were willing to cross the equator to participate in the workshop in Stellenbosch. I hereby thank Gary Knoppers (The Penn State University), Ehud Ben Zvi (University of Alberta), Oded Lipschits (University of Tel Aviv) and Josef Wiesehöfer (University of Kiel) for their valuable contributions.

Without funding this project and publication would also not have materialised. I gratefully acknowledge the following institutions for funding provided for various aspects of the project, the workshop and the publication of this volume: the Division for Research Development of my own institution, the University of Stellenbosch (for a Collaborative Research grant during 2009–2010); the National Research Foundation of South Africa (for a Knowledge Interchange and Collaboration grant for travel costs of international participants); the Oppenheimer Memorial Trust (for a special grant towards funding the STIAS workshop); the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, Bonn (for funding the travel costs of a German participant); and the Dutch Reformed Church Curatorium (for an Alumni Fund grant towards the publication of this volume).

I also want to extend our gratitude towards the editors of the *Forschungen zum Alten Testament II* series, Professors Bernd Janowski (Tübingen), Mark S. Smith (New York) and Hermann Spieckermann (Göttingen) for acting as peer reviewers of this publication, and for accepting it for publication. Verlag Mohr Siebeck, with Dr Henning Ziebritzki and his very competent staff also deserves our appreciation for the professionalism with which they completed this publication project. Lastly, Edwin Hees deserves a great word of thanks for his language editing, as well as Delmarie Alexander for her assistance with the formatting.

Louis Jonker
September 2011
Stellenbosch

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Exploring Contexts

Exploring Readings

List of Abbreviations

AASOR	Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
ABR	Australian Biblical Review
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
AfO	Archiv für Orientforschung
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AION	Annali dell'Istituto Orientale di Napoli
AJSR	Association for Jewish Studies Review
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
Atiqot	ʿAtiqot
ATSAT	Arbeiten zu Text und Sprache im Alten Testament
BA	Biblical Archaeologist
BAIAS	Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society
BASOR	Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BEATAJ	Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentum
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
Bib	Biblica
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation
BibOr	Biblica et orientalia
BOTSA	Bulletin for Old Testament Studies in Africa
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
CurBS	Currents in Research
DJD	Discoveries in the Judeean Desert
DMOA	Documenta et Monumenta Orientis Antiqui
ErIsr	Eretz Israel
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GRBS	Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HBT	Horizons in Biblical Theology
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament

HS	Hebrew Studies
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies
HUCA	Hebrew Union College Annual
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IEJ	Israel Exploration Journal
IES	Israel Exploration Society
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JHS	Journal of Hellenic Studies
JJS	Journal of Jewish Studies
JNSL	Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages
JSJ	Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods
JSJSup	Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods: Supplement Series
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
JSS	Journal of Semitic Studies
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
JTSA	Journal of Theology for Southern Africa
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible / Old Testament Studies
LSTS	Library of Second Temple Studies
LXX	Septuagint
NEA	Near Eastern Archaeology
NGTT	Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OG	Old Greek
OIP	Oriental Institute Publications
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
Or	Orientalia
OTE	Old Testament Essays
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	Old Testament Studies
PEQ	Palestine Exploration Quarterly
QD	Quaestiones Disputatae
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSCS	Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
Semeia	Semeia
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SJOT	Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament
SR	Studies in Religion
SSN	Studia Semitica Neerlandica
StOR	Studies in Oriental Religions
TA	Tel Aviv
TC	Textual Criticism

ThViat	Theologia Viatorum
Transeu	Transeuphratène
TynBul	Tyndale Bulletin
UF	Ugarit-Forschungen
VT	Vetus Testamentum
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplementum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZABR	Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte
ZAW	Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
ZDPV	Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins

Introduction

Introduction

Reflecting on Historiography and Identity Negotiation

LOUIS JONKER

The notion of "identity negotiation" has become an important category in the interpretation of biblical writings in recent years.[1] Not only has there been an increasing number of publications reflecting this notion in their titles, but acknowledgement of the fact that biblical writings could have contributed to certain processes of identity negotiation in their ancient contexts of origin is also evidenced in many recent studies.[2] The study of biblical historiography is particularly influenced by this tendency.

One could argue that this trend says more about contemporary times than about the time of origin of these biblical writings. One should be aware of the fact that the interest of biblical scholars in the identity negotiation processes in biblical times is most probably a reflection of their awareness that the social location of the interpreter is determinative in the process of understanding. It is also a reflection of their acknowledgement of the tendentiousness of all literary constructions, including historiographies. Since scholars are well aware of how these issues apply to their own contexts as interpreters and authors, they start "retro-polating" them into the time of origin of the biblical writings.

This trend in biblical studies should not be evaluated negatively, however. On the contrary, it focuses the attention of biblical scholars on the universality

[1] See e.g. the latest publication in this regard: Lipschits, Knoppers and Oeming (eds.), *Judah and the Judeans*, 2011.

[2] Numerous studies on New Testament texts deal with identity issues. The following is a small selection of publications that have appeared only in the past three or four years: Harland, *Dynamics of Identity*; Telbe, *Christ-believers in Ephesus*; Holmberg, *Exploring Early Christian Identity*; *Identity Formation in the New Testament*; Nguyen, *Christian Identity in Corinth*; Zangenberg, *Religion, Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Galilee*.

However, there are also an increasing number of publications dealing with Hebrew Bible and Deuterocanonical texts that take issues of identity as their starting point. See the following examples: Jonker (ed.), *Historiography and Identity (Re)formation*; Knoppers and Ristau (eds.), *Community Identity*; Calduch-Benages and Liesen (eds.), *History and Identity*; Gomes, *The Sanctuary at Bethel*; Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*.

in all ages of the fact that social groups are constantly involved in processes of identity negotiation, and that the literature produced by those social groups is always an integral part of these processes. Although this happens in all circumstances, it is particularly periods of socio-political and/or socio-religious transition that prompt the production of literature (of all sorts, but often including historiographies) that participates in the processes of adapting existing identities or negotiating new identities in uncertain times. The Hebrew Bible historiographies of the Persian era, that is, those works that were composed during the time of restoration after the Exile, are particularly interesting in this respect and are worth studying from this perspective.

The research documented in this volume stems from a project which deliberately intended to facilitate an interdisciplinary discussion on the relationship between historiography and identity negotiation in Persian-period biblical literature. In the initial formulation of the research project several points of departure (outlined below) were put forward in order to facilitate interdisciplinary interaction.

Explorations of texts and intertexts: The Hebrew Bible historiographies from the Persian period (i.e. Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles) will have to be investigated in order to describe their different materials and rhetorical strategies. Additionally, those later textual traditions in which these biblical historiographies are represented, as well as early translations of these works, will have to be explored in order to see how these traditions were received in later generations. Furthermore, the intertextual relations between the historiographies and non-historiographical literature from the Persian period will have to be explored in order to establish whether common themes and trends can be observed. Lastly, the biblical historiographies also have to be studied in interaction with studies of contemporary historiographies from other cultural environments.

Explorations of socio-historical contexts: The socio-historical (i.e. socio-political, socio-cultural and socio-religious) conditions of provincial existence in the Persian province of Yehud (and its continuation into the Hellenistic era from 322 BCE) will have to be investigated. This investigation should include a study of the different religious factions in Yehud in order to contextualise the Hebrew Bible historiographies. Additionally, the political and economic relationships between the province Yehud and the imperial powers (Persian and Hellenistic), as well as its relationship with other surrounding imperial provinces, will have to be investigated, together with the international context of the time, as well as the power relations between Persia, Egypt and Greece.

Explorations of methods: It should be determined whether current trends in general historiography (such as theoretical reflection on the process of history writing) could provide any insights into the dynamics of history writing in the Persian period, and recent studies on the relationship between remembrance

and historiography will have to be considered in this context. Furthermore, current trends in the social-psychological study of identity negotiation should be explored in order to find models for describing the dynamic interaction between historiography and identity negotiation in Persian-period biblical literature. Recent developments in postcolonial criticism have to be investigated for the same purpose.

Explorations of readings: Readings of Persian-period biblical historiographies in contemporary societies of socio-political and socio-religious transition, such as post-apartheid South Africa, should be explored in order to observe how this literature is received and appropriated in such a modern-day context.

Although not all contributions that were delivered at the project workshop could be included in this volume, various aspects of these explorations appear in the essays that follow.

The essay by *Robert Vosloo*, which follows as the second (methodological and philosophical) part of the introduction to this volume, explores Paul Ricoeur's reflections on historiography. With reference to Ricoeur's book *Memory, History, Forgetting* Vosloo particularly explores this philosopher's exposition on the epistemology of historical knowledge. He grapples with Ricoeur's understanding of how the past can be represented, as well as of how to deal with the vulnerability and instability inherent in attempts to represent the past. Vosloo places Ricoeur's discussion on "the historiographical operation" (consisting of a documentary phase, a phase of explanation and understanding, and a representative phase) within the context of the broader argument of *Memory, History, Forgetting*, and asks whether the writing of history is a remedy or a poison in the light of the vulnerability of memory. In the final section of his contribution, Vosloo points to the need for what he calls a responsible historical hermeneutic. He identifies three contours for such a hermeneutic. First, a responsible historical hermeneutic ought to be critical of the idea that the historian is value-free and dispassionate in her or his account of the past. Therefore over-confident claims to historical objectivity that disregard the role of the subject should be deflated. Secondly, one should acknowledge that a responsible historical hermeneutic is both vulnerable and realistic. And lastly, a responsible hermeneutic will acknowledge the need for an ethics of memory and of history.

Four further contributions explore *texts and intertexts* from the Persian and Hellenistic periods in Ancient Israel.

Gary Knoppers surveys the theme of exile, corporate identity and repatriation in historiographical and prophetic texts as a prelude to discussing the Diaspora in Ezra-Nehemiah. He starts his discussion by exploring the concept "exile" and the way that a number of important exiles referred to in the historical writings are critical to grasping how the Judahite authors construed the

Babylonian deportations. He then discusses two prophetic traditions that both reflect and respond to changing conditions in the Neo-Babylonian and early Persian periods, namely Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's restoration prophecies. He finally concentrates on Ezra-Nehemiah, which provides glimpses of another way by which Judeans adapted to changing international circumstances in the Persian period. He highlights the fascinating way in which this particular literary work develops the interplay between homeland and diasporic communities within the larger context of an international empire.

Louis Jonker registers the deficit in present studies on identity negotiation in books such as Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles, as examples of historiographies from the Persian period, in that they often tend to discuss the rhetorical thrust of these historiographies only within the limits of Yehud and Jerusalem, without considering the wider socio-historical contexts of the time. He shows that the communication embodied in this literature is multi-levelled, corresponding to the multi-levelled socio-historical context of the time. He therefore distinguishes four different socio-historical contexts within which a book such as Chronicles communicates: firstly, the Persian imperial context; secondly, the regional provincial context; thirdly, the inner-Yehudite context; and fourthly, the cultic context in Jerusalem. He then discusses four example texts from Chronicles which take part in a multi-levelled process of identity negotiation. He firstly discusses 1 Chronicles 23–27 as an example of the intra-group categorisation which took place within the Jerusalem cult. This is followed by an exposition of 1 Chronicles 21 as paradigm of intra-group categorisation processes within the province of Yehud. A third example, 2 Chronicles 21, is used to illustrate the intra-group and inter-group categorisation among the neighbours of Yehud, and the presentation of Solomon in Chronicles serves as illustration of inter-group categorisation processes within the Persian Empire. He comes to the conclusion that the Chronicler mastered the art of "speaking-in-the-imperium" whereby a prototype of the "All-Israel" community was developed in interaction with inner-Yehudite cultic factions and tribes, as well as with neighbouring provinces and the international imperial context.

Ehud Ben Zvi focuses on the impact of Prophetic Literature, Chronicles and the Deuteronomistic historical collection on the formation of communal identity in late Persian Yehud. He contends that they did so not directly as historiographical or prophetic literature, but through their contribution to the shaping of the community's social memory, or at least that of the literati who read and reread these books. Ben Zvi therefore considers it important to investigate the array of underlying generative structures and systemic preferences that led to the construction of, and partiality for, particular memories in Yehud. He therefore sets out to examine some elements of their social mindscape, which in itself provides much information about their group identity

and the social "mental fences" that they developed to maintain it. At the end of his study Ben Zvi observes a very common preferred trait of the general discourse of late Persian Yehud in its past-constructing and other authoritative texts. From a system's perspective, he indicates that there was a strong preference for the presence of multiple voices and for a collective memory that included vast arrays of seemingly contradictory memories (and thus by implication a de-emphasising of the mimetic aspect of both memory and historiography). An Israel that imagined itself through the reading of the authoritative literature of the late Persian period was an Israel that imagined itself as constantly balancing and thus integrating different viewpoints, memories, statements and even law texts. This is an Israel in which texts were constantly informing other texts and in which, within limits to be sure, multiple perspectives were allowed.

In his contribution *Johann Cook* moves over to the exploration of some intertexts. He does so by focusing on the provenance of, and translation techniques reflected in, the Septuagint translations of Proverbs and Job. He indicates, with reference to various examples from these wisdom texts, that the two translations probably reflect the ideologies and identity concerns of different communities (Palestinian Judaism in the case of LXX Proverbs, and Alexandrian Judaism in the case of LXX Job) during the Hellenistic part of the Second Temple period.

The second part of this volume concentrates on the exploration of various aspects of the *socio-historical contexts* of the Persian period.

Josef Wiesehöfer, a specialist in Ancient Iranian history, was requested to provide a description of the major phases in state formation in the Achaemenid Empire and to expound on the features of this state. A deficit in many other histories of the Persian period is that they are often written by biblical scholars who tend to provide Jerusalem-centred perspectives on the Persian past. Wiesehöfer's contribution therefore approaches the matter from the imperial side, describing the legal-administrative, religious and economic conditions of the Achaemenid Empire through a thorough analysis of the Persian royal ideology. He also attends to the relationship between the central imperial power and the province of Yehud. Although this province was peripheral when viewed from the Persian imperial centre, its geographical location nevertheless caught the attention of the Persian rulers (as the Persian military fortresses in this part of the world indicate). Wiesehöfer concludes that "Achaemenid rule was astonishingly successful for more than two hundred years, thanks to royal endeavours for the well-being of the kings' subjects, thanks to the high degree of granted autonomy and structural 'tolerance', not least, however, also thanks to the strict and partly severe supervision by the imperial centre. It came to a surprising end because of the outstanding mili-

tary and tactical talent of a military opponent, not for lack of internal cohesion or because of insurmountable administrative or economic crises."

Oded Lipschits provides insights into the conditions of Persian-period Judah as evidenced in archaeological finds. He contends that – although the "Persian period" is historically well defined between Cyrus' conquering of Babylon and Alexander's successful campaigns – the transitions from the Babylonian to the Persian, and from the Persian to the Hellenistic periods do not find prominent expression in archaeological finds in Judah. Lipschits therefore suggests a three-tier periodisation of the Persian era in Judah: the early Persian period in the late 6th and early 5th centuries BCE is a transitional period from the Babylonian period, with no marked change in the material culture. The early *yhwd* stamp impressions on jar handles found in excavations also belong to this period. The second period can be dated between the second half of the 5th century BCE and the first half of the 4th century BCE. The typical and "classical" Persian material culture stems from this period. The main change in the form, style, paleography, and orthography of the *yhwd* stamp system occurred during the late 5th or even the early 4th century BCE, probably as a result of tighter Persian control in the administration. As part of this change, some secondary administrative centres took a much more important role in the system, and at these sites the most important Persian-period pottery and other finds were discovered. The late Persian–early Hellenistic material culture is well dated to the late 4th and early 3rd centuries BCE. The changes in the material culture (especially the script and pottery) were probably slow and gradual, and as can be seen from the *yhwd* stamp impressions, there is a clear continuity in administration and economy from the late Persian to the early Hellenistic period in nearly every aspect. The marked changes in nearly every facet of the material culture occurred only in the middle of the 2nd century BCE.

Izak Cornelius investigates the visual symbol systems of Yehud and Samaria respectively in order to come to some conclusions on identity negotiation and self-understanding in Persian-period Palestine. He concentrates on the iconography of seal impressions and coins, and therefore compares the glyptic record of Yehud to the iconographic repertoire of Samaria (the Wadi Daliyeh bullae in particular), as well as the motifs of the Yehud coins to that of Samarian coins. He comes to the conclusion that – although there were also many commonalities between the provinces of Yehud and Samaria – the motifs in their iconography of the seals and coinage reflect different symbol systems and different identities. On the basis of these differences Cornelius suggests that the people living in Samaria were more open to foreign ideas than the inhabitants of Yehud were. The iconography on seals and coinage suggests that Samaria had a more diverse population worshipping different deities in addition to Yahweh. Since the seals and coins tell "a tale of two cities", Cornelius

suggests that this imagery can make a significant contribution in any reflection on identity negotiation during this period.

In the third part of this book some *readings* of Persian-period historiographies within the contemporary context of post-apartheid South Africa are offered.

Gerrie Snyman employs a "decolonial" reading in his investigation into the real and intended audiences of Chronicles. In formulating his approach he distinguishes between colonialism and coloniality; whereas the former term is defined as the economic and political relations between a minority of foreign invaders and a majority of indigenous people, while the latter term refers to long-standing patterns of power that survive the formal demise of colonialism. In other words, coloniality often outlives colonialism. Political independence often does not bring independence of power. He therefore takes as his point of departure the fact that the destruction of colonialism as a political order did not remove coloniality as the most general form of domination in the current world order. This presupposition then informs his interpretation of Chronicles, in particular the Chronicler's narrative about King Asa (2 Chr. 14–16). He argues that Chronicles creates a parallel relationship between Asa and Cyrus; Asa forms the negative counterfoil to Cyrus, who becomes the chosen one during and after the exile. On the basis of this reading of Asa and Cyrus in Chronicles, Snyman concludes that Chronicles is a colonial text, and in fact shows the effect of Persian colonialism on those inhabiting the province of Yehud. According to him, the book represents the ideologies and sociopolitical location of a ruling elite that embraced Persian imperialist values. Whereas one can assume that the actual readers would have been those associated with this cause, the book may be read as constituting a defence for becoming Persian allies, in which case the intended readers could have been those who needed persuasion, that is, the subaltern in Yehud. Snyman contends that the story of Asa is part of the public transcript of those in power in Yehud that ties the history of Yehud to that of the Persian Empire. It creates a coloniality of knowledge whereby the royal history of Judah culminates with the assumption of power of a benevolent Cyrus, to whom tolerance for the "Other" is ascribed. Moreover, Yahweh sides with power, not with the subordinated, whose transcript remains hidden because they lack power and writing.

Makhosazana Nzimande concentrates on the expulsion of foreign women as told in Ezra 9–10. In doing so, she employs an *Imbokodo* hermeneutic, which is informed by her status as a black, Zulu, South African, female reader of the Bible, as well as insights from postcolonial criticism. Through this multifocal lens she explores the prevalence of historical memory and identity contestations in Ezra 9–10. She concludes that the various cultural, historical, religious and ethnic identity struggles inherent in both the *golah* community and

among the people of the land in the Second Temple period are reminiscent of the struggles of black women in post-apartheid South Africa and other post-colonial social locations. The implications of reading Ezra 9–10 are that black women in South Africa must adopt an ambivalent reading stance whereby they identify with those areas of struggle in the *golah* community that resemble their own, while condemning the unfair treatment of the people of the land and the expulsion of foreign women by the same community.

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The Writing of History as Remedy or Poison?

Some Remarks on Paul Ricoeur's Reflections on Memory, Identity and "The Historiographical Operation"

ROBERT VOSLOO

A. Introduction

In his monumental work *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (2000; translated into English in 2004 as *Memory, History, Forgetting*) the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur uses as the epigraph to one part of his book the following quotation from Herodotus' *The History*:

> I, Herodotus of Halicarnassus, am here setting forth my history [historiē], that time may not draw the color from what man has brought into being, nor those great and wonderful deeds, manifested by both Greeks and barbarians, fail of their report, and, together with all this, the reason why they fought one another.
>
> The chroniclers [logioi] among the Persians say that it was the Phoenicians who were the cause of the falling-out …[1]

Ricoeur does not comment on this quotation directly in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, apart from asking in a footnote: "Herodotus: the 'father of history' (Cicero) or the 'father of lies' (Plutarch)?"[2] Nevertheless, the quotation from Herodotus raises important questions regarding historiography, questions that Ricoeur deals with at length in his work. These questions are pertinent to the theme of this conference on historiography and identity as well. Herodotus justifies his project – the setting forth of his history – in the context of the danger that time might detract from the events, drawing "the color from what man has brought into being." But Herodotus is not only interested, or at least so it seems from this quotation, in chronicling the "facts", but also in providing an interpretative framework for the events, providing the reason "why they fought one another." In addition, the quotation (specifically chosen by Ricoeur) suggests that historiography and identity, or even historiography and

[1] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 133. Ricoeur is quoting from Herodotus, *The History*, 33.

[2] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 525.

prejudice or bias, are closely intertwined. Whereas Herodotus refers to the chroniclers among the Persians pointing to the Phoenicians as the culprits in the conflict, one cannot help but reflect on how we often frame our accounts of events in such a way that we (or our friends and benefactors) become the heroes in the tale, while at the same time we paint a darker picture of our competitors or enemies. This of course raises the much-discussed concerns about historiography and objectivity, as well as the concomitant reality of contested historical portrayals.

Ricoeur places the quotation from Herodotus' famous work as the epigraph to the second part of *Memory, History, Forgetting* – the section that deals with the epistemology of historical knowledge. In this essay I will attend more closely to Ricoeur's discussion of this particular topic, with a special focus on what he calls, following Michel de Certeau, "the historiographical operation." Ricoeur refers in this regard to three phases, which he describes as the documentary phase, the explanation/understanding phase and the representative phase. Central to Ricoeur's reflection in this section, and in the book as a whole, is the problem of the representation of the past. What draws me to Ricoeur's discussion is his sensitivity to what one can describe as the vulnerability and instability inherent in attempts to represent the past. But Ricoeur does not merely challenge optimistic and even arrogant claims that pretend to give "objective" accounts of what happened in the past, accounts that do not display the necessary epistemological and hermeneutical awareness. He is also concerned with the faithful or truthful representation of the past, thus taking seriously the continuity *and* discontinuity between history and fiction. In the process Ricoeur takes on questions addressing "the reality of the historical past," to use the title of his 1984 Aquinas lecture.[3]

In order to engage with Ricoeur's discussion of the epistemology of historical knowledge, I will briefly place his discussion on "the historiographical operation" within the context of the broader argument of *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Given the focus of our conference on historiography and identity, I will recall too Ricoeur's emphasis on the vulnerability and even abuse of memory, especially in the light of our projects of identity construction. In addition, before outlining the different stages of the "historiographical operation," I will draw attention to the way in which Ricoeur introduces his discussion of the epistemology of history by revisiting Plato's famous attack on writing in the *Phaedrus*. Hence the question whether the writing of history is a remedy or a poison in the light of the vulnerability of memory. In the final section of the essay I point – in the light of the engagement with Ricoeur – to the need for what can be called a responsible historical hermeneutic, also for church and theological historiography in South Africa.

[3] Cf. Ricoeur, *The Reality*.

B. The Vulnerability and Abuse of Memory

Just before the table of contents in *Memory, History, Forgetting* there is a picture of a baroque bronze sculpture from the Wiblingen monastery in Ulm, Germany (it is also found on the cover of the French text). Ricoeur interprets this sculpture in an adjacent note:

> It is the dual figure of history. In the foreground, Kronos, the winged god. An old man with wreathed brow: his left hand grips a large book, his right hand attempts to tear out a page. Behind and above, stands history itself. The gaze is grave and searching; one foot topples a horn of plenty from which spills the cascade of gold and silver, sign of instability; the left hand checks the act of the god, while the right hand displays history's instruments: the book, the inkpot, and the stylus.

The picture of this enigmatic sculpture and the accompanying commentary offer a fitting announcement of Ricoeur's intention in *Memory, History, Forgetting* to grapple with questions relating to the importance of – and difficulties associated with – the quest for the representation of the past. Kronos as an old man represents the fleeing of time into the past. One is reminded of Herodotus' concern "that time may not draw the color from what man has brought into being." History, the other figure in the sculpture, holds the instruments for conquering time. With the passing of time, the past moves into oblivion and becomes, on a fundamental level, inaccessible to us. Nevertheless, we try to gain access to the past and interpret it, which is made possible by the fact that traces remain in memory. Through the writing, recording and reading of history, we try to represent – to make present again – the past by attending to these traces.

It is between the fallible power of memory and the force of forgetfulness that Ricoeur places his philosophy of history in his aptly titled book, *Memory, History Forgetting*. Although this book resists easy summary, the broad argument of the book is presented in three clearly defined parts. It is tempting to see these three parts as three separate books, but as Charles Reagan observes: "(T)he genius of the book is the structure, the interconnections, that Ricoeur weaves among the philosophical paradoxes of memory, the aporias of forgetting, and the mediating role of history."[4]

The first part of the book is, as the title suggests, devoted to a discussion of memory. Ricoeur's *phenomenology* of memory begins with an analysis of the object of memory (*le souvenir*) and passes through the search for a given memory (*anamnesis*, recollection). The discussion then moves to memory as it is exercised (reflective memory), with reference to the use and abuse of memory. This section also includes a discussion of individual and collective memory. The second part of the book can be viewed as an *epistemology* of

[4] Reagan, "Reflections", 309.

history. Here Ricoeur discusses the three phases of the historical operation: the stage of testimony and the archives (the documentary phase); the phase of explanation and understanding; and the historian's representation of the past on a scriptural level (the representative phase). Throughout this discussion Ricoeur is interested in the historian's intention to produce a truthful reconstruction of the past. The third part of the book is framed within a *hermeneutics* of the historical condition. In this section Ricoeur argues for a critical philosophy of history that is "attentive to the limits of historical knowledge that a certain hubris of historical science transgresses time and time again."[5] In addition, this section contains a meditation on forgetting. The epilogue of the book (a full 50 pages) deals with what Ricoeur terms "difficult forgiveness." Although *Memory, History, Forgetting* has – apart from the epilogue – three clearly distinguishable sections, Ricoeur emphasises that these sections do not constitute three separate books, but can be seen instead as three masts with interlocking but distinct sails that belong to the same ship setting off on a single itinerary. There is a common concern that "flows through the phenomenology of memory, the epistemology of history, and the hermeneutics of the social condition: the problematic of the representation of the past."[6]

When one reflects on the question of the representation of the past, the thorny issue of the relationship between memory and history comes to the fore. This relationship is certainly complex, given – among other things – that both "memory" and "history" have multiple senses. Nevertheless, one can agree with Geoffrey Cubitt's statement that history and memory "are proximate concepts: they inhabit a similar mental territory."[7] In Ricoeur's discussion of the relationship between memory and history he clearly does not fuse the terms, but sees memory as the womb of history. Although Ricoeur gives a high place to memory in his thinking, he is deeply aware of what he refers to as the vulnerability of memory, acknowledging in the process the possible abuses of memory. The reality of the vulnerability of memory often explains the recourse to the security of the noble dream of historical objectivity, hence privileging history over memory. Ricoeur warns against this temptation. Moreover, he strongly advocates that we do not approach memory merely from the viewpoint of its deficiencies, but also in the light of its capacities.[8]

[5] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, xvi.

[6] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, xvi.

[7] Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 4. Cubitt views history and memory as conceptual terms "circling each other warily or amorously, sometimes embracing, sometimes separating, sometimes jostling for position on the discursive terrain that is their common habitat" (5). On the complex relationship between memory and history, see also Megill, *Historical Knowledge*, 17–59.

[8] The themes of fallibility and capability are important for Ricoeur's philosophical project. See, for instance, his earlier work *Fallible Man*. In an interview with Sorin Antohi, Ricoeur refers to a move in his philosophical anthropology from fallibility to capability: "In the intermediate book between *Memory, history, forgetting* and *Time and nar-*

For our reference to the past we have no other resource than memory itself. Consequently, Ricoeur emphasises that our acknowledgement of the unreliability of memory must be interwoven with the admission that memory is our one and only resource to signify the past character of what we declare we remember. The deficiencies of memory should thus not be viewed from the outset as pathological and dysfunctional, "but as the shadowy underside of the bright region of memory."[9] As Ricoeur states: "To put it bluntly, we have nothing better than memory to signify that something has taken place, has occurred, has happened *before* we declare that we remember it."[10]

Given the focus of this conference on questions relating to historiography and identity, it is worth attending in a bit more detail to Ricoeur's informative discussion of the abuses of natural memory. According to Ricoeur, these abuses of memory occur on three levels, namely the pathological, therapeutic level (referred to by Ricoeur as "blocked memory" or "wounded memory"), the practical level (described as "manipulated memory") and the ethico-political level (termed "obligated memory"). Ricoeur places on the practical level – the level of manipulated or instrumentalised memory – the important problem of memory and (personal and collective) identity. He is especially interested in the way in which memory is mobilised in the service of the quest and demand for identity. As he writes elsewhere, "the diseases of memory are basically diseases of identity."[11] The fragility of memory is therefore interconnected with the fragility of identity. Ricoeur mentions three causes for the fragility of identity. The first cause relates to the complex relationship between identity and time.[12] At the heart of the matter is the question of what it means to be the same or identical over time, while at the same time also being open to deal with change. The second cause of the fragility of identity relates to our encounter and confrontation with others and otherness. We perceive the other as a threat, as a danger to our own identity. In the process we turn "a welcome into rejection, into exclusion."[13] Ricoeur also refers to a third cause of the fragility of identity, namely the heritage of founding violence. In this regard, Ricoeur makes the following provocative statement:

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rative, namely, *Oneself as another*, the central concept is man as he is able and capable. What man *can* do: I *can* speak, I *can* narrate, I *can* act, I *can* feel responsible … therefore my last book on memory, history and forgetting is related not to fallible man but to capable man, this is to say that man is capable of making memory and making history". See Ricoeur & Antohi, "Memory, history, forgiveness", 17.

[9] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 21.

[10] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 21.

[11] Ricoeur, "Memory and Forgetting", 7.

[12] Cf. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting,* 81. On the relationship between time and (narrative) identity see also Ricoeur's influential discussion in his books *Time and Narrative,* and *Oneself as Another.*

[13] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 82.

> It is a fact that there is no historical community that has not arisen out of what can be termed the original relation to war. What we celebrate under the heading of founding events are, essentially, violent acts legitimated after the fact by a precarious state of right, acts legitimated, at the limit, by their very antiquity, by their age. The same events are thus found to signify glory for some, humiliation of others. To their celebration, on the one hand, corresponds their execration, on the other. It is in this way that real and symbolic wounds are stored in the archives of collective memory.[14]

Ricoeur's remarks on the contested nature and ambivalent consequences of founding events point to the fact that it is important not to ignore questions of identity in the reflection on memory and historiography. The possible misuses of memory and history in the quest and demand for identity formation and maintenance should be acknowledged. However, one should also admit that there is no refuge from questions of identity by fleeing into some identity-free realm of historical "objectivity." This said, the question remains how to construe the relationship between memory and identity, or history/ historiography and identity, in such a way that we challenge insulated and exclusionary notions of identity. This raises questions that point to, among other things, the need for a responsible historical hermeneutic that is sensitive to ethical concerns.

Ricoeur is attentive to the problem of an ethics of memory. He admits that memory can be ideologised through the various resources of narrative configuration, with the notion of power coming into play as well. The stories of founding events, glorious deeds and humiliating actions can feed the discourse of flattery and fear. Ricoeur is therefore highly critical of certain commemorations and rituals that attempt to fix the relationship with the past.[15] He argues, however, that narratives are not only the occasion for manipulation, "but also the place where a certain healing of memory can begin."[16] It is possible to tell the story in another way in which the exercise of memory is "an

[14] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 82.

[15] In this context, Ricoeur, in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 86, refers to Tzvetan Todorov's essay *Les Abus de la mémoire*. This essay is an indictment of the frenzy for commemorations with their parades, rites and myths. Todorov warns against the unconditional praise for memory as the stakes are too high to leave memory to enthusiasm or anger. Ricoeur cites the following point from Todorov: "The work of the historian, like every work on the past, never consists solely in establishing the facts but also in choosing certain among them as being more salient and more significant than others, then placing them in relation to one another; now this work of selecting and combining is necessarily guided by the search, not for truth, but for the good". Although Ricoeur raises questions regarding positing truth and goodness as stark alternatives, he is nevertheless interested in placing questions related to the abuse of memory under the auspices of the search for justice. Ricoeur furthermore motivates his own research on memory and history by the fact that he is troubled "by the unsettling spectacle offered by an excess of memory here, and an excess of forgetting elsewhere, to say nothing of the influence of commemorations and abuses of memory – and of forgetting" (*Memory, History, Forgetting*, xv).

[16] Kearney and Dooley, *Questioning Ethics*, 9.

exercise in *telling otherwise*, and also in letting others tell their own history, especially the founding events which are the ground of a collective memory."[17]

C. The Epistemology of Historical Knowledge

I. Historiography: remedy or poison?

Ricoeur's phenomenological sketch of memory highlights the vulnerability and fragility of memory, and points – implicitly at least – to the need for an ethics of memory, and one can add, an ethics of history/historiography. In acknowledging the fragility of memory one ought to reiterate Ricoeur's assertion that memory, individual and collective, is our primary resource for the representation of the past. Historiography can only take the long route through memory, since memory is the matrix of history. Moreover, history also has a certain "autonomy" that aims at strengthening or challenging individual and collective memory. It is in this context that Ricoeur places his epistemology of historical knowledge (the second part of *Memory, History, Forgetting*).

Ricoeur introduces his discussion of the epistemology of history by revisiting Plato's famous attack on writing in the *Phaedrus*. What draws Ricoeur to the Platonic myth dedicated to the invention of writing is the fact that the myth views the gift of writing as an antidote to memory. Ricoeur views this "as the paradigm for every dream of substituting history for memory."[18] Ricoeur is interested (as is Jacques Derrida) "in the insurmountable ambiguity attached to the *pharmakon* that the god offers the king."[19] In the Platonic myth the god Theuth tells the Egyptian king that he has discovered a potion (*pharmakon*) that, once its formula has been learned, will make the Egyptians wiser and will improve their memory. This *pharmakon* is the writing (*grammata*) that comes from the father of writing. The king then gives the god the privilege of engendering the art, but he retains the right to judge its benefit or harm. How does the king respond in the end to the god's offer? Ricoeur recounts the king's response:

> In fact, it will introduce forgetfulness into the soul who learn it: they will not practice using their memory [*mnēmēs*] because they will put their trust in writing [*graphēs*] … You have not discovered a potion [*pharmakon*] for remembering, but for reminding [*hupomnēseōs*]; you provided your students with the appearance of wisdom, not with its reality.[20]

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[17] Kearney and Dooley, *Questioning Ethics*, 9.
[18] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 138.
[19] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 141.
[20] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 142.