MEMORY AND THE CITY IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

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Contents

Abbreviations .................................................. vii

Part 1
Opening the Gates

An Introduction and Invitation to Join the Conversation about Cities and Memory ......................................... 3
Ehud Ben Zvi
Cities of Glory and Cities of Pride:
Concepts, Gender, and Images of Cities in Mesopotamia and in Ancient Israel ........................................ 21
Stéphanie Anthonioz

Part 2
Crossing the Gates and Entering into the City (of Memory):
Memories of Urban Places and Spaces

Testing Entry:
The Social Functions of City-Gates in Biblical Memory ........................................ 43
Carey Walsh
Inside-OutSide:
Domestic Living Space in Biblical Memory ........................................ 61
Anne Katrine Gudme
Threshing Floors and Cities ........................................ 79
Francis Landy
Palaces as Sites of Memory and Their Impact on the Construction of an Elite “Hybrid” (Local-Global) Cultural Identity in Persian-Period Literature ........................................ 99
Kåre Berge
City Gardens and Parks in Biblical Social Memory ........................................ 115
Diana Edelman
In Defense of the City: Memories of Water in the Persian Period ........................................ 157
Karolien Vermeulen
Cisterns and Wells in Biblical Memory ........................................ 177
Hadi Ghantous and Diana Edelman
Part 3
Individual Cities and Social Memory

Exploring Jerusalem as a Site of Memory in the Late Persian and Early Hellenistic Periods 197
Ehud Ben Zvi

The Memory of Samaria in the Books of Kings 219
Russell Hobson

How to Slander the Memory of Shechem 231
Yairah Amit

Mizpah and the Possibilities of Forgetting 245
Daniel Pioske

Dislocating Jerusalem’s Memory with Tyre 257
Philippe Guillaume

Nineveh as Meme in Persian Period Yehud 267
Steven W. Holloway

“Babylon” Forever, or How To Divinize What You Want To Damn 293
Ulrike Sals

Building Castles on the Shifting Sands of Memory:
From Dystopian to Utopian Views of Jerusalem in the Persian Period 309
Carla Sulzbach

Index of Authors 321
Index of Scripture 328
An Introduction and Invitation to Join 
the Conversation about Cities and Memory

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Ancient cities served as the actual, worldly landscape populated by “material” sites of memory. Some of these sites were personal and others were directly and intentionally involved in the shaping of a collective social memory, such as palaces, temples, inscriptions, walls, and gates. Many cities were also sites of social memory in a very different way. Like Babylon, Nineveh, or Jerusalem, they served as ciphers that activated and communicated various mnemonic worlds as they integrated multiple images, remembered events, and provided a variety of meanings in diverse ancient communities. This volume emerged out of the sessions and inspiring conversations devoted to the theme “Cities as Sites of Memory in the Persian and Early Hellenistic Period” that the EABS research group “Israel and the Production and Reception of Authoritative Books in the Persian and Hellenistic Period” organized in 2011 and 2012. Additional contributors, as suggested in the mentioned conversations, were sought in 2013. The sessions addressed questions, such as what kinds of memories were evoked by specific cities or by their palaces, domestic spaces, walls, cisterns, threshing floors, and the like? In which ways did these memories affect the social mindscape of the community?

Memory-studies approaches and insights are beginning to make inroads in studies of ancient Israelite history and literature but are still “new” to many scholars, including readers of this volume. Following the approach of

1. As we all know, the term ancient Israel, which appears in the title of the book, may be understood in more than way, because there were several “ancient” Israels. Clearly in this particular case, we are referring to the “ancient Israel” that imagined, remembered, and identified with (main contours of) the “Israel” constructed through, shaped in and evoked by reading and rereading a particular repertoire of books. A core, defining feature of this repertoire is that the present forms—note the plural—of the majority of the books that eventually ended up in the Hebrew Bible provide a significantly representative sample of its main contours. In other words, we might say that this historical “ancient Israel” consists of those who saw themselves as one temporal manifestation of the transtemporal “biblical” Israel that they themselves conceptualized. The editors, as many others in the field, date this “ancient Israel” and the ideological/theological “Israel” they identified with to the late Persian / early Hellenistic period.
the research group, the authors included in this volume were encouraged to walk their own journeys, and each took her or his own path. The result is a thought-provoking conversation and a kaleidoscope. The aim of this volume is to bring this sort of conversation to the readers with the hope they will join it, through their own works and in their own voices.

As mentioned by Anne Katrine Gudme in her contribution, “texts are the mnemonic media par excellence” and “literature is culture’s memory.” This volume focuses in the main, but not exclusively, on memories and sites of memory as shaped, reflected, and encoded in books that eventually became part of the Hebrew Bible (hereafter and for simplicity only, the HB). The reason for this choice is that, from the perspective of a community in the late Persian or early Hellenistic period, these texts evoked (and represented) core aspects of the social (or cultural) memory of the community that read and reread them in the early Second Temple period (mid-late Persian to early Hellenistic periods). This said, and as several of the contributors of this volume have underscored, physical places, whether standing or in ruins, tend to show a strong generative role in the creation of memories. There is room for a complementary volume that focuses primarily on city, memory, and archaeology and even for a third to provide a multidimensional perspective on these issues. The editors would welcome volumes such as these and be delighted if the present work spurs their production and continues the conversations advanced here.

This volume is divided in three separate though partially overlapping sections. The first, “Opening the Gates,” includes this introduction to the volume and the chapter by Stéphanie Anthonioz, “Cities of Glory and Cities of Pride: Concepts, Gender and Images of Cities in Mesopotamia and in Ancient Israel,” in which she compares basic conceptualizing tendencies concerning cities in two areas of the ancient Near East: Mesopotamia and Judah/Israel. She then addresses the genderization of cities and the ways in which it may have or may not have had an impact on the shaping of images and memories of both individual cities and urban places and spaces. The second section, “Crossing the Gates and Entering into the City (of Memory),” explores memories of urban or urban-related places and spaces such as palaces, gardens, gates, threshing floors, cisterns and wells, and domestic spaces as well as the social roles of some of these memories within the community whose authoritative repertoire of texts included the former. In other words, this section is about some places and spaces, imagined and remembered, as characteristics of urban centers.


3. Contemporary approaches to the interrelated concepts “place” and “space” are strongly informed directly or indirectly by Yi-Fu Tuan, Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977).
third section explores particular cities as sites of memory and the communal memories evoked by individual cities. There is a certain overlap between the sections, particularly given the central role of Jerusalem in the discourse of the relevant communities and the fact that any discussion of memories of places and spaces in cities of old represented in read and reread texts cannot but evoke memories of the particular cities.

As per the established genre of introductions to collected essays, I will draw attention in the following paragraphs to some aspects of the essays included in the volume as a service to the readers of this introduction and with the hope of enticing them to read carefully the relevant chapter and the collection as a whole. It is not feasible in any way to do justice the complex issues, detailed discussions, and methodological considerations and debates addressed in these chapters. Nor does the genre itself allow it. Much is left unsaid, but hopefully, what is said here will encourage readers to join all the contributors, including the editors, in their journey to explore the multiple aspects of “The City and Social Memory,” primarily in the late Persian and early Hellenistic periods in Judah/Yehud.

The chapter by Stéphanie Anthonioz, “Cities of Glory and Cities of Pride: Concepts, Gender and Images of Cities in Mesopotamia and in Ancient Israel,” opens the gates of our conversation about cities and memory. As mentioned above, she compares basic conceptualizing tendencies concerning cities in two areas of the ancient Near East: Mesopotamia and Judah/Israel. Anthonioz addresses, among other things, issues concerning their deification (or lack thereof), their human or divine origins, their participation in discourses about royal glorification, and the personification and female genderization of cities and the ways in which this genderization may or may not influence memories about the cities. To address these matters, Anthonioz discusses the ways in which cities were imagined, evoked, and remembered, as evidenced by the appropriate literary and ideological corpora. Among the positions she advances in her essay are (a) “no single gendered image of cities emerges in ancient Mesopotamia”; (b) in Mesopotamia, cities were conceptualized according to both divine and royal ideology; (c) the corpus of texts that eventually became included in the HB attests a more complex and ambivalent attitude, involving positive and negative imagery and memories; in these texts, cities “human creations, not divine in origin”; (d) “whenever . . . notices [of, for example, construction or fortification of cities] are reduced to mere information without glorifying rhetoric, the writers are critiquing and implicitly condemning the king in question”; (e) personification, including feminization, is most effective when the role not only is assigned to the city but also played; and (f) the city of Jerusalem stands apart in that process of personification and metaphorization. Images of the city within the repertoire seem to shape a woman’s life narrative from a “young woman who becomes a rebel and prostitute, who is rejected and
despised, widowed and bereaved, before she is chosen again and espoused, as though some divine pedagogy is at work regarding the chosen city. . . . [Jerusalem is remembered] as a character who experiences pain and sorrow but also joy as her ‘life’ unfolds.” Moreover, “this seems to constitute the very core of the process of memorialization”; no other city is so memorialized in the HB.

The second section of the volume, “Crossing the Gates and Entering the City (of Memory): Memories of Urban Places and Spaces” opens appropriately with a chapter on city gates. Carey Walsh (“Testing Entry: The Social Functions of City-Gates in Biblical Memory”) discusses various memories involving events or characters in which the city gate played an important narrative and symbolic role. She analyzes, for instance, the symbolic role of city gates for setting boundaries, conferring social status, advancing social harmony, communicating a sense of protection, and constructing and exploring transitionality and liminality. Walsh elaborates on how memories of gates of old and and their associated areas may have functioned in Persian Yehud and what imagining and remembering a landscape populated by fortified cities, each with its own walls and gates, may have “done” for the community at that time.

The next contribution by Anne Katrine Gudme (“Inside, Outside: Domestic Living Space in Biblical Memory”) begins with a thought-provoking observation: “in the Hebrew Bible, domestic living space is often defined by what it is not.” She continues with a survey and analysis of textual memories of domestic spaces, while at the same time paying attention to archaeological data. Gudme notices that there are hardly any descriptions of the interior of the house in the HB, which is a very significant point. She dwells on memories of domestic space and the manner in which the latter is usually associated with protection, shelter, safety, and hospitality, but at times with their reversal, when the world is upside down or in danger of being upside down. Gudme explores how domestic spaces became conceptual and imaginative lenses through which readers could envisage and characterize what is clearly outside the domestic space, namely, the general society. She discusses “domestic space as gendered space” and how this spatial gendering relates to the social and economic activities of common women that were widely appreciated in the context of the society of the time. Among Gudme’s conclusions: “domestic space in the Hebrew Bible plays a central role in matters of hospitality and in delineating boundaries between inside and outside, ours and theirs, and safety and danger. . . . Statistically, the narratives that identify domestic space as sheltered and as relatively safe space dominate the picture. . . . Therefore, one may conclude that, in the cultural memory of Persian-period Yehud, domestic living space was primarily associated with protection and shelter . . . although the safety of the house or tent could be ambiguous and potentially dangerous . . . or even shattered completely, as in the description of devastated Jerusalem. . . . Interestingly, and not
surprisingly, women frequently play an important role in these descriptions of domestic space. . . . Women belong to the domestic sphere as does hospitality, but according to the Hebrew Bible, the two may not mix well.”

Francis Landy (“Threshing Floors and Cities”) deals with the juxtaposition of city and threshing floor and as he does so, turns our attention to literary threshing floors, “threshing floor[s] of the mind and the imagination,” which acquire “significance from . . . [their] position in the discourse as part of a panoply of references on both paradigmatic and syntagmatic planes, as well as sensations and connotations from everyday life.” Landy focuses primarily on memories, imagination, and sensations evoked by two main narratives that take place in threshing floors, 2 Samuel 24 / 1 Chronicles 21 and 1 Kings 22 / 2 Chronicles 18. His careful study of the former leads him to underscore threshing floors as sites of hybridity.

The transaction between David and Araunah contrasts with or supplements the account of the conquest of Jerusalem in 2 Samuel 5 and corresponds to the statement in Judg 1:21 / Josh 15:63 about the cohabitation of Benjaminites/Judahites and Jebusites “to this very day.” . . . The altar marks the collaboration of Canaanites and Israelites. If, as 2 Chr 3:1 suggests, it is the foundation story of the Temple, it characterizes the Temple itself as being hybrid, as constructed over the site of an agreement between the two peoples, the purchase of land being a sign that David, and Israel with him, has truly come home.

Landy also stresses the role of the threshing floor in this narrative(s)/memory(ies) “as the turning point between life and death.” Early in his discussion of 1 Kings 22 / 2 Chronicles 18, he writes, “Here, the threshing floor is a mirror image of Samaria and, by implication, the entire Northern Kingdom, the crossing point between life and death; as in 2 Samuel 24, it is the site of an oracle, a meta-communication on the narrative. . . . As a threshing floor, it is a metonymy for the fecundity of the kingdom, just as the 400 prophets testify to its divine inspiration and authorization. . . . As an empty, ritualized space, though, it opens up the vacuity of the city; it makes it the antithesis of Jerusalem in 2 Samuel 24, except that Jerusalem and all cities will be destroyed.” Throughout the essay, he relates these two stories. Landy’s essay also has a strong methodological dimension. Although he deals with various methodological issues, directly and indirectly, within the present context it is particularly worth noting his discussion of “the poetics of memory, that is, of the way that memories become the objects of thought and imagination.”

Landy’s essay brought to our attention royal figures in the context of threshing floors. Kåre Berge leads us to study memories of urban places most commonly associated with royalty, as he deals with “Palaces as Sites of Memory and their Impact on the Construction of an Elite “Hybrid” (Local-Global) Cultural Identity in Persian Period Literature.” Berge raises questions such as “what does it mean . . . to make the next generation remember a palatial
edifice or structure and to understand its meaning?” “How is the monarchical palace of Jerusalem remembered in the Persian period?” He makes the point that “there was barely any interest in the old, monarchical palace of Jerusalem as a site of material memory . . . [because] the temple (past, present, and future) drew all the attention and the royal palace was, mainly, ignored.” Moreover, “since one should assume that there were ruins of the palace and that the population ‘knew’ where the palace used to be in the past, ‘forgetting’ about both should lead to some reflection from both a methodological and a historical or social-scientific point of view, and beyond the obvious point that there was no human king who reigned over Judah from Jerusalem in the Persian period.” Berge stresses the point by noticing that even in the utopian landscapes of the future to come that existed at the time, there is no reference to a rebuilt royal palace.

As one shifts the gaze to the remembered past it becomes clear that most references to palaces of the old monarchical period are negative or carry negative associations, once one moves beyond the foundational, Davidic-Solomonic period. Why is this the case, asks Berge. He thinks one explanation may “involve the idea of monarchical royal sin (cf. Sir 49:4).” Another might be “the idea that the only real ‘large house’ belongs to the Persian kings.” Further, “the presentation of the temple in Jerusalem as a הֵיכָל for the heavenly king in the Golden Age of Solomon represented no challenge to the Persians’ authority from a political perspective but allowed a form of ideological resistance,” which brings us back to some of the observations mentioned above.

At the same time, Berge notes that “the reports about the larger size of the Solomonic palace vs. the temple and about the time that Solomon invested in building each one of them . . . demand some discussion,” one that he also advances in this essay. Concerning this point, his analysis leads to the conclusion that “memories of the palace of Solomon, and even of succeeding kings in Jerusalem, are “free-floating,” not linked to the ruins of Nehemiah’s time as a site of memory. . . . By participating in an international, ‘hybrid’ elite culture, however, these biblical memories give significance to the place of Jerusalem, providing the city a discourse or identity.” Moreover, informed by the work of the French philosopher M. de Certeau on memory, Berge argues that Jerusalem’s royal palace of memory “detaches itself from the place it is supposed to define and serves as an ‘imaginary meeting-point on itineraries,’ to express it in de Certeau’s words (cf. Ps 45). . . . This is why one can continue to speak of those palaces in the Persian period and later, without any need to attach it to the ruins or even the rebuilt palimpsests of the palace structures in Jerusalem.” The essay concludes with complementary considerations based on memory, collapse, and postcolonial studies.

The next chapter is by the co-editor of this volume, Diana Edelman, who provides us with a broad discussion of “City Gardens and Parks in Biblical
Social Memory.” She discusses “what constituted a garden in the thought of ancient Judahite and Judean societies, whose memories predominate in the texts,” dwells on matters of terminology, and then explores issues of gardens and royal ideology in ancient Israel within the context of and in a way strongly informed by studies on these matters concerning various ancient near Eastern cultures. Next, she studies royal gardens and gardeners remembered in and evoked by biblical texts, including Persian Kings, Solomon, Ahab, and “Uzza,” before turning to investigate memorial gardens. The final section pays much attention to YHWH as the divine gardener. Among her observations are the following: “almost all the references to gardens, parks, and orchards involve royal . . . or divine gardens.” “Solomon becomes the site of memory for a past Golden Age when peace prevailed in an Israelite-rulled empire and this king created and used royal gardens (Eccl 2:5) that rivaled those associated with Cyrus the Great and Cyrus the Younger by Xenophon.” The garden of “Uzza” likely refers to a new burial ground established by King Hezekiah for his new royal line. “Biblical memory emphasizes YHWH’s role as a gardener of his chosen city, Jerusalem (e.g., Isa 31:5; 37:35; 51:3), and of the ‘Promised Land,’ which he planted, pruned, and weeded/uprooted as though it were a huge park containing cultivated garden areas adjoining his earthly palatial residence.”

Karolien Vermeulen’s chapter (“In Defense of the City: Memories of Water in the Persian Period”) discusses “the perception of water resources in the urbanized context of Persian-period Yehud as it is reflected in biblical texts,” that is, memories associated with water and conceptualizations of water. She examines, among other things, the semantics of natural and domesticated water in Biblical Hebrew—this point is stressed because as stated by J. Fentress and underscored by Vermeulen, “memory is structured by language.” Next, she surveys “different attestations of water and water supplies . . . in biblical texts traditionally understood as originating from the Persian period: the books of Chronicles, Ezra–Nehemiah, Trito-Isaiah, Psalms 120–34, and the prophetic books of Zechariah, Haggai, and Malachi.” Here, she also discusses how a text such as Genesis 1, which she dates earlier than the Persian period, was likely reread in that period and pays particular attention to Zech 14:8 and the ideology communicated by this memory of the future. She then proceeds with a study of “the memories evoked by the several attestations” and “the role of water in these memories.” Among Vermeulen’s general conclusions are the following: “While the semantic field of water covers a broad range of natural and domesticated forms of water resources, the texts under study show a clear preference for the latter understanding of water. Even natural water is used in humanly controlled constructions, such as the Fountain Gate and the blocking up of natural springs during warfare. The references evoke memories of formational episodes from the past, centering on undestroyed Jerusalem,
the Davidic monarchy, and the wilderness tradition. As such, they negotiate between past and present, the divine realm and the human world, in order to help the community reestablish their identity. Although the metaphorical use of water to refer to God is present in the text at times, the memories seem to stress the human perspective. Water is conceived as a powerful tool for the community, both in their interactions with other people and in their encounters with the divine.”

The last chapter in this section by Hadi Ghantous and Diana Edelman (“Cisterns and Wells in Biblical Memory”) continues the conversation on the conceptualization of water and memories of water, a topic that has been, on the whole, understudied.4 Ghantous and Edelman write at the beginning of their chapter:

by exploring the references to cisterns and wells in the collective whole, we can begin to understand the meaning they encoded for the community, which was reinforced through reading and rereading the texts in which they appear . . . [and] they evoke both life, when they provide water, and its opposite, death, when water dries up or when a person or animal falls into either. In addition, they evoke the opposites, fullness and emptiness. They also evoke concealment, which can be both positive, when it involves hiding from danger, and negative, when it is the result of forced imprisonment or an intention to deceive.

Their study of cisterns and wells located in walled settlements includes a survey of the roles of wells and cisterns, a discussion of definitions, where they challenge the current understanding of interchangeability between the two terms, and a substantial discussion of memories and conceptualizations of wells and cisterns as sources of life and blessing and as places of death, imprisonment or burial. They note, among other things, that

wells have more positive general connotations than cisterns, undoubtedly due to their ability to give access to fresh water from the underground water table; however, in biblical memory, they play a minor role in stories about walled settlements . . .

Public wells were a natural place for people to meet one another as they drew water for daily use . . . [and] are places particularly associated with females, who were primarily responsible for fetching water for the household on a daily basis . . .

In Song 4:13–15, [a well is used] to describe a female’s reproductive organs. . . .

The well would symbolize the channel that gave access to underground, fresh water that flowed like the emissions. In the context of female anatomy, it would

4. There seems to have been a shift on these issues in the last years. For recent works, see, for instance, Stéphanie Anthonioz, L’eau, enjeux politiques et théologiques, de Sumer à la Bible (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Ehud Ben Zvi and Christoph Levin, eds., Thinking of Water in the Late Persian/Early Hellenistic Period in Judah (BZAW 461; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014).
symbolize the vagina and likely, in ancient thought, the womb as the source of the emissions, which was also conceived of metaphorically as a “spring.”

Finally, they note that the two uses of the root יָרָא as a Piel verb in Deut 1:5 and 27:8 are likely “designed to set up a deliberate contrast between the Torah, as the well giving access to fresh water that is vital to sustain life, and the divine mountain, Mt. Horeb, which is a place of ‘dryness’ and so is not life-sustaining.” Concerning cisterns, they note, among other things, that they “exemplify and evoke the biblical world view of the Promised Land being יָהֳウェר’s garden tended by his farmer servants.” Ghantous and Edelman also discuss the large set of memories that associated cisterns and wells with images of death, burial, and imprisonment reflected in biblical texts. Their concluding summary states that “cisterns and wells form essential sites for biblical drama, sites where life and death and the struggle with both of them meet and face each other.”

The third and final section in the book deals with particular cities as sites of memory. The section begins and ends with chapters devoted to Jerusalem, which is appropriate, given the prominence of Jerusalem as a site of memory within the communities discussed here. The opening chapter is my own contribution (“Exploring Jerusalem as a Site of Memory in the Late Persian and Early Hellenistic Period”). It contains two main sections. The first deals with “interactions between different ways in which Jerusalem served as site of memory and contributed to the shaping of other sites of memory and core mnemonic narratives in the community” and “with processes by which material signposts in Jerusalem influenced the discourse of the period and the ways in which Jerusalem was remembered and, conversely, the impact that Jerusalems of the mind had on social and political developments. . . in other words, it traces connections between material Jerusalems and the Jerusalems of the mind and vice versa.” This section deals, for instance, with the mnemonic, generative importance of low population, empty spaces and ruins in and around Jerusalem in the Persian period and with intra- and interprovincial interactions in historical Yehud and their contribution to the shaping of memories of Jerusalem. In addition, this section addresses the fact that memories evoked by the temple-centered Jerusalem of the mind that existed within the community were most likely the reason that the temple and, eventually, Jerusalem were rebuilt in the first instance, and that this sort of Jerusalem of the mind continued to influence the “material” city. The second section explores central constructions of “Jerusalem” from the perspective of social memory. It discusses, among other things, matters of mindshare, of central cities, cosmic order, divine wisdom, and of their manifestations in the remembered future of the community, of hierarchies and gendered images, of divine creation and building of Jerusalem, secondary human partners and imago dei, of memories of monarchic Jerusalem in postmonarchic Jerusalem, and of how multiple memories and images of Jerusalem balanced each other. The chapter concludes by noting that
Jerusalem was a site of memory that did not necessarily foreground images of busy markets, workers, human houses, or an implied urban characterization of labor. . . . Instead [it] communicated a sense of utopian and eternal cosmic sanctity. . . . As such, Jerusalem had to exist eternally but also had a reality outside historical time, just like its foundational streams of waters. This Jerusalem . . . provided hope for the future, facilitating a Jerusalem-centered version of traditional ancient Near Eastern motifs consistent with the discourse of the community. . . . At the same time, it turned a potential cognitive dissonance into an argument sustaining the main tenets of the then-present community while simultaneously contributing to the formation of in-group boundaries that separated the community from other communities of YHWH worshipers in the vicinity of Yehud as well as the role and centrality of the temple within Yehud.

Historical developments in Jerusalem and Yehud cannot be understood without reference to Samaria. The next chapter in the volume by Russell Hobson, “The Memory of Samaria in the Books of Kings,” deals with memories of Samaria and with Samaria as a site of memory in late Persian-period Jerusalem from the perspective of the community reading the book of Kings. The chapter begins with considerations about cultural memory, identity, and communal authoritative repertoires and their social roles that lead to an explanation of the heuristic power of the discourse of anthropology and cognitive psychology. Here, his main focus is on the use of concepts such as cognitively optimal and cognitively costly representation and the theory of minimal group paradigms proposed by H. Tajfel to further the study of social memory in the communities discussed here. In the rest of the chapter, he explores “how Whitehouse’s theory of corrupted doctrine and Pyyäinen’s theory of doctrinal revival [along with Tajfel’s theory of minimal group paradigms] could help explain the construction of the memory of Samaria in the book of Kings.” Hobson argues that “in its revived form [unlike the older layers of doctrinal material], the material that concerns Samaria in the books of Kings has been redrafted to polemicize the relationship between that city and the city of Jerusalem. . . . As the model Northern city, Samaria represents a kind of anti-Jerusalem.” He reasons that the view of the precalamity, sinful, YHWH-rejecting Jerusalem, which ideologically is an “anti-Jerusalem” present toward the end of the book of Kings, “colors discourse earlier in the book concerning Samaria. . . . The negative portrayal of Samaria is, in fact, a response to the demise of Jerusalem. . . . The Northern capital is presented consistently as an inverse of YHWH’s chosen city in terms of its foundation, its rulership, and the character of its cult.” According to Hobson, what makes “these memories all the more effective is their ability to combine cognitively optimal and cognitively costly representations through the use of a novel and potentially interesting format. . . . The construction of Jerusalem as sanctioned and Samaria as rejected creates an easy way to conceptualize the interaction of two competing concepts of identity.” And yet, Samaria is not only an “anti-Jerusalem,” because
the two cities were sisters who shared the same fate as estranged wives of Yhwh, seeking reunification with their husband, their baʿal. . . . These notions need not have been exclusive in the minds of those reading and rereading the texts. . . . [T]he memories of Samaria that existed in the minds of the literate elite in Yehud, utilized effective methods of memorization that would have encouraged the coexistence of the two memories within the national psyche. . . . Human memory has evolved a tremendous capacity for eliding consistency in order to maintain a sense of cohesiveness. . . . The biblical texts, as products of human and cultural memory, show us exactly this.

Samaria is not the only city identified with the North. Yairah Amit’s chapter deals with Shechem and already in her choice of title, “How to Slander the Memory of Schechem,” she reminds us that remembering Schechem most often involved slandering Schechem within the collective memory of the Israel whose memory is revealed through biblical texts. Amit surveys memories of Shechem reflected in Genesis, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, and Kings and discusses similarities with Jerusalem that “create the impression that Jerusalem replaced Shechem in the Judean collective memory.” She notices ambiguities and argues that

the ambiguous memory of Shechem is part of the “mythic” history of the city from early times. . . . This ambiguity is retained throughout the Deuteronomistic History. . . . The reader may ask: why is the city, which appears in the covenant ceremony in Josh 24:1–28, not mentioned in the ceremony that takes place near Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim in Deut 11:29–32, chap. 27, and Josh 8:32? . . . Why is the city not mentioned after the division of the Kingdom? . . . What trend operated to avoid any mention of the city or to depict it negatively?

Then Amit addresses mnemonic/literary “tendentiousness and its means of expression.” In particular, she looks at the means used to detract from Shechem’s status and the explicit avoidance of references to Shechem in the literature, pointing out the city is not mentioned in the Deuteronomistic Historical collection after the reign of Jeroboam I and very rarely in the prophetic books, except in Hos 6:9 and Jer 41:5. The net effect is a blurring its presence and insertions of negative or derogatory comments about Shechem in existing narratives that effectively contribute to the shaping of a negative memory of Shechem. Among Amit’s conclusions are the following:

[it] transpires that, despite the importance and centrality of the city of Shechem, it appears in a thoroughly negative light in biblical memory. . . . Some returnees regarded Shechem and the Northern population favorably and had marriage ties with them (Neh 13:28–29), especially before Ezra and Nehemiah restored Jerusalem . . . [but o]thers were interested in separation and remaining aloof; they would not have regarded the people of the North as worthy associates in the temple of Jerusalem . . . [and] would have made every effort to denigrate Shechem and its surroundings, declaring that this was not the place that God had
chosen to establish His name. . . . Both groups created the complex literary reality in the texts of the Hebrew Bible and the effect it has had on historical memory.

During the Neo-Babylonian era, the political capital of the province of Judah was Mizpah and likely remained as the political center in the early Persian period. The next chapter by Daniel Pioske, “Mizpah and the Possibilities of Forgetting,” focuses on this city and, in so doing, brings to the forefront the issue of forgetting. Pioske writes, “In a volume devoted to the city as a site of memory in the Hebrew Bible, the place of Mizpah finds particular importance, because it offers insights into how the work of remembering connected to the writing and reading of these ancient texts also included, in certain instances, the work of forgetting.” Given the close relationship between place and memory as discussed and underscored by Pioske in this chapter and Mizpah’s ability “to survive the events that ended the kingdoms of Israel and Judah and remain a center of highland life in the Neo-Babylonian and early Persian periods,” the peculiar silence surrounding Mizpah’s time as capital within the biblical narrative demands an explanation. “When the historian turns to those texts written by the generations affected by these events [that is, the Babylonian invasion and the catastrophe to the area that it brought], literary references to the century of Mizpah’s rule are nearly entirely absent.” They actually stop after the story of Gedaliah’s murder, despite the fact that “the site continued to function as the provincial center of the region.” Thus, Mizpah “provides a concrete and compelling example of an ancient literary culture’s attempt to negotiate their community’s past by expunging certain memories from their writings.” Pioske underlines that “the lack of references to its [Mizpah’s] history in the 6th century B.C.E. coincides with the preservation of prominent allusions to its more distant past within this same body of literature.” Pioske’s analysis, informed by Paul Ricoeur’s discussion of manipulation of memories and forgetfulness by those in power, leads him to the conclusion that

the strong bond between place and memory and the persistence of Mizpah’s physical remains as one journeyed northward from Jerusalem would have made this a particularly difficult forgetting, and it is for this reason, perhaps, that certain images of Mizpah’s importance in a more ancient past were preserved and lifted up within the biblical narrative. . . . The textual silence surrounding Mizpah’s century of rule after Jerusalem’s fall, however, suggests that particular memories of this time were a burden too difficult to bear for those behind the formation of the biblical narrative and that the exigencies of remembering a certain past through these writings were inextricably bound to the possibilities of forgetting others.

The volume then moves on to three non-Israelite cities that became important sites of memory for the literati of the early Second Temple: Tyre, Nineveh, and Babylon. Philippe Guillaume studies memories of the first in his contribution, “Dislocating Jerusalem’s Memory with Tyre.” He argues that the HB
“uses Tyre as a nonmaterial lieu de mémoire that is crucial to the way Yehudites were to experience Jerusalem.” He points out that “Tyre’s fabulous wealth is associated with ultimate hubris” but also that Tyre was strongly contrasted with Sidon, citing multiple examples, and that in this context, Tyre was portrayed very positively, as a benevolent city. One of its kings was even remembered as acknowledging Yhwh’s sovereignty. He argues that “underlining the boundary between Tyre and Sidon served to reduce the distance between Tyre and Jerusalem and to bracket Samarian Israel.”

Following a discussion of Tyre and Tyrians in Chronicles and Nehemiah, Guillaume refers to the

two sides of the same coin: heads is a religious depiction of Tyre as a generous patron of the temple. . . . Tails is stuck with the price of Tyre’s generosity; the dominant position of Tyre and Sidon in the market in Jerusalem. . . . Theology legitimates Tyrian generosity toward the temple of Jerusalem and seeks to curtail the implications of this generosity by remembering the original temple of YHWH was a Judahite piece of art made with Tyrian materials.

Then he shifts his attention to the prophetic corpus and some relevant Psalms. He notices a different approach is used here. He argues that “the classification of Tyre as an enemy [in several of these texts] plays on the standard resentment of farmers the world over, who associate trade with robbery” and who construe themselves as “self-righteous victims of external traders.”

Guillaume underscores that many “modern commentators are as virulent as the prophets in their denunciations” of “merchant greed,” and by doing so they confuse memory with history in their attempt to identify with the prophets of old. There are other voices, however, within the prophetic texts “besides the caricature of Tyre as the capital of extortion.” For instance, Isa 23:1–18 closes with an oracle of restoration. Now, “instead of stockpiling her wealth on the island, Tyre dedicates it to YHWH and sends it to the temple in Jerusalem to feed and clothe the faithful. Rather than wishing for Tyre’s destruction, Isaiah accepts Tyre’s dominant position as preordained by YHWH himself, so that Tyre’s wealth can benefit Jerusalem.” Guillaume pointedly writes about the conceptual world of this passage: “Renewed Tyrian trade is still qualified as prostitution, but here, of a sacred kind. . . . Tyre’s profits will be used to support those who live in YHWH’s presence. . . . Wall Street remains Wall Street but its profits find their way to Me’ah She’arim.”

After a discussion of several other prophetic texts, Guillaume addresses constructions of Tyre as a partial template for Jerusalem and “experiencing Tyre in Jerusalem.” In this section, he proposes, among other things, that “Yehudites were made to experience Jerusalem and its temple more or less consciously as an island of spiritual treasures isolated from its surroundings” and in their encounter with the materiality of the temple, construed and remembered as the successor of the Solomonic temple, the Yehudites also experienced their Tyre.
He concludes with the statement, “Memory recovers what history ignores: the thickness and permanence of social reality that history shortcuts with the presentation of significant events and individuals. . . . Remembered apart from Tyre, Jerusalem is less Jerusalem.”

The next chapter by Steven W. Holloway (“Nineveh as Meme in Persian Period Yehud”) discusses Nineveh, a city that agitated the imagination of various groups, including Yehudites, Greeks, Egyptians, and Arameans, for centuries after its destruction. Holloway first explores the multiple memories associated with Nineveh in biblical texts. He examines those attested in Genesis, Kings, Isaiah, and Zephaniah and dwells extensively on those constructed by the books of Nahum and Jonah. Clearly, Nineveh is often portrayed in extremely negative terms. “In most parts of the Bible, Assyria, destroyer of the Northern Kingdom and would-be destroyer of Zion/Jerusalem, is dabbed in garish Technicolor tones crafted to illustrate its violent and devastatingly efficient militarism. . . . Nineveh is a city of bloodshed, deceitful, crammed with booty.” But Nineveh is also a fascinating and multivalent site of memory that served to explore numerous theological issues in Yehud. In fact, as he concludes the section on the Nineveh of the book of Jonah, Holloway asks, “How many of the tormenting theodical conundra of postmonarchic Yehud did the polyvalent figure of Nineveh address?”

Holloway also notices significant absences that require explanation. To begin with, biblical memories of Nineveh have little to do with the “historical” Nineveh. “Nineveh . . . was a helpless ghost, a dirigible memory susceptible to 10,000 variant retellings with no angry Assyrians left to disavow the Bible’s artistic license.” It is not just that the Nineveh(s) of the Bible were not about the historical Nineveh but about Jerusalem and those remembering it in postmonarchic Yehud, but also that little particular, historical knowledge about Nineveh is reflected in Nahum or Jonah. Moreover, “while Zephaniah makes of the ruins of Nineveh a Mahnmal, horrifying all passers-by who can connect the crumbling ruins with the once-proud Assyrian capital, the Hebrew Bible does not memorialize the monuments left in Israel, Judah, and surrounding states that testify to Assyrian military prowess. . . . The fall of Lachish, Judah’s most heavily fortified city, and the heaps of war-dead buried in mass graves are passed over in silence.” Holloway discusses all these issues, their possible significance, and the possible reasons for these absences.

In addition, Holloway places the meme “Nineveh” in its ancient, post-Assyrian context, by examining images and memories of Nineveh (and its Sargonid-period kings) in ancient nonbiblical sources. He devotes sections to BM 21901 (96-4-9,6), Papyrus Amherst 63, the fall of Nineveh in Seleucid pseudepigraphic apologetics, Nineveh in Greek “Persika” literature, the pattern of successive world empires beginning with Assyria, Inaros legends in Demotic literature, the Aramaic Sheikh Faḍl inscription, Ahiqar legends, and Tobit and Judith as well. He regularly compares the construction of Nineveh or its kings
in these texts and in biblical books. In one case, he concludes that “unlike the Bible, none of the Sardanapallus stories attribute the fall of Nineveh to an act of vengeance against former Assyrian depredations. . . . On the contrary, Arbaces, a Median general under Sardanapallus, conspires with a Chaldean priest to oust the Assyrian king ‘because the Assyrian lacked nobility.’” In another,

Egypt retained Nineveh and its Sargonic kings as potent memories susceptible to imaginative reformulation eight centuries after the historical extirpation of the Assyrian Empire, although the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C.E. does not resonate in the extant retellings. . . . The Egyptian storytellers refashioned national heroes into weapons mighty enough to defeat the Assyrian invaders, exact political submission, and redress the scandal of deported divine images. . . . In the Hebrew Bible, the one hero capable of besting the Assyrians was YHWH.

His chapter includes an excursus entitled “Herodotus Histories as Persian Empire Foil for Biblical Nineveh.”

As Ulrike Sals (“Babylon Forever or How to Divinize What You Want to Damn”) notes, “no other city except Jerusalem is mentioned as often as Babylon in the HB.” She begins her study of Babylon as a Yehudite site of memory by underscoring the difference between Babylon, the historical city, and “Babylon,” namely, “a symbol of world power, of self-reliant women, and of anti-Yahwistic morals.” She notes also that “various texts in the Hebrew Bible, in effect, divinized ‘Babylon’ in their attempt to damn it.” In the ensuing pages, she develops an analysis of “some traits of the ‘Babylonian’ mystique” that zooms in on matters such as “Babylonam delendam esse,” “Babylon is everything,” “power and gender,” “site as (literary/ideological/mnemonic) topos,” “‘Babylon’ as an admired civilization,” “other capitals, kingdoms, and ‘Babylon,’” “Jerusalem/Judah and ‘Babylon,’” and “YHWH and ‘Babylon.’” It is worth noting that “‘Babylon’ has more than one gender, just like YHWH.” She then turns her attention to literary techniques used to construct a powerful and certainly memorable “Babylon.”

Sals concludes her chapter with a description of the process used for divinizing “Babylon” and analyzing its details. In a nutshell, there are five main components for the process: (a) “quantify: imagine ‘Babylon’s’ destruction many times”; (b) “create a web of linked images”; (c) “eternalize: let ‘Babylon’ be a symbol for ‘eternal’ problems such as civilization, urbanism, self-reliant women, and power-hungry rulers”; (d) “demonize: intensify ‘Babylon’s’ evilness until only YHWH himself can defeat it; “integrate: add ‘Babylon’ to your religious system of symbols . . . and link it with other constituent elements, making it the opposite counterpart to Jerusalem and the opponent of YHWH”; and (e) “adjust: whenever something historical happens to Babylon, integrate it into your literary and religious image of ‘Babylon.’” This “recipe” for the construction of the site of memory “Babylon” is heuristically very helpful and thought-provoking and so is Sals’s final conclusion: “‘Babylon’ will never cease to exist because its destruction is forever near.”
Following the explorations of these diverse cities as sites of memory, the volume goes back to “the City,” Jerusalem of the late Persian period. This time, the contributor is Carla Sulzbach, with “Building Castles on the Shifting Sands of Memory: From Dystopian to Utopian Views of Jerusalem in the Persian Period.” In her opening paragraph, she states, “throughout the Persian period . . . Jerusalem most likely was ‘nothing to write home about’ for those who actually lived there —which is, of course, exactly what did happen: not the real city, but the one of constructed memory and imagination would be the subject of song and story.” But which Jerusalem(s) is/are constructed out of memory and imagination? Sulzbach’s starting point is her previous work on Lamentations 2 and Psalm 24 and the mirror images and memories that these texts evoked. She notes here, in particular, the attention and, I would say mindshare, given to “the gates and walls, those architectural features that deal specifically with allowing and denying access.”

Real or imaginary architectural features play important roles in the construction of memories and acts of remembrance. It is in this context that Sulzbach brings to the fore texts such as Ps 48:13–14[12–13], which urge “the addressees to make a mental map of an obviously restored Jerusalem in order to recount it to the following generations.” People are to be reminded of the glorious Jerusalem even generations after it is established. Why would that be? What does it say about those imagining utopia? Moreover, which architectural features are to be remembered?

In all these poetic and/or prophetic descriptions, the focus is on the public spaces of the city’s defense works, its temple, and its palaces. . . . The domestic spaces and urban arteries such as streets and squares are hardly, if at all, touched on, with the exception of Lam 2:11–12, 19, 21 where, in the absence of the deity, they have become a place of death. . . . Purely utopian texts, such as Psalm 24, are mostly focused on a reconstituted sacred space at the expense of the lived spaces of the actual city dwellers.

Sulzbach also notes not only that the remembering of Jerusalem in various ways, as well as reminders of the city, be they utopian or dystopian, are necessary to Israel in the Persian period, but also that the community constructs a deity that needs to be reminded of Jerusalem; see, for example, Isa 62:6–7. “Nehemiah feels compelled to remind God of the poor state of society, as if he would not know.”

Sulzbach’s contribution dwells considerably on a number of other issues, including mythic patterns that contributed to the shaping of memories of Jerusalem, convergences between mythic and not necessarily mythic patterns, and connections between constructions of particular memories of Jerusalem.

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especially those concerning its walls, and the mindset of the golah-literati and their opponents as reflected in Ezra–Nehemiah and in texts from Elephantine and Al-Yahudu. Her summarizing conclusion to her contribution is as follows:

Through the use, reuse, and manipulation of especially standardized architectural motifs, an image of Jerusalem and the temple is created that far exceeds any resemblance to historical reality. Through the creative use of these shared, remembered, and memorized elements, a fictive reality emerges that allows its users to identify with the created image as well as with each other. We have a community with an identity that is lodged in a text that paints its own reality. Since this picture tallies neither with the material real past nor the real present, there is only one direction to go: the future. Of course, the question remains whether the implementation of a society based on one group’s “remembrance” of a utopian golden past, be it theocratic or not, is desirable, but this is a different issue that cannot be discussed here.

The preceding survey of the contents of the book has drawn attention to some of the ideas and arguments advanced by the contributors while also conveying something of the flavor of their voices. After this “appetizer,” it is up to the reader to peruse “the real thing” as a main course and, hopefully, to join the conversation about city and memory in late Persian and early Hellenistic Yehud so as to advance historical knowledge on this important topic for the reconstruction of the world of ideas of the early Second Temple period. Diana Edelman and I look forward to the continuation of the conversation.