

WAS 1 ESDRAS FIRST?

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WAS 1 ESDRAS FIRST?
An Investigation into the Priority and Nature of 1 Esdras

Volume Editor
Lisbeth S. Fried

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and Nature of 1 Esdras

edited by

Lisbeth S. Fried

Society of Biblical Literature
Atlanta

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For Michael

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
AJSL	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature</i>
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BEATAJ	Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentum
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BibS(F)	Biblische Studien (Freiburg, 1895–)
<i>BJPES</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society</i>
BJSUCSD	Biblical and Judaic Studies from the University of California, San Diego
BK	Bibel und Kirche
<i>BN</i>	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>DSD</i>	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
<i>ErIsr</i>	<i>Eretz-Israel</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GTA	Göttinger theologischer Arbeiten
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTKAT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>IJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>

<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JSHRZ</i>	<i>Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit</i>
<i>JSJSup</i>	Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods: Supplement Series
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
<i>JSP</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
<i>JSPSup</i>	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha: Supplement Series
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>KAT</i>	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>LCL</i>	Loeb Classical Library
<i>LSTS</i>	Library of Second Temple Studies
<i>LXX</i>	Septuagint
<i>MSU</i>	Mitteilungen des Septuaginta-Unternehmens
<i>MT</i>	Masoretic text
<i>NCB</i>	New Century Bible
<i>NICOT</i>	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NTT</i>	<i>Nieuw Theologisch Tijdschrift</i>
<i>OBO</i>	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
<i>OCT</i>	Oxford Classical Texts/Scriptorum classicorum bibliotheca oxoniensi
<i>OTL</i>	Old Testament Library
<i>OTR</i>	Old Testament Readings
<i>OTS</i>	Old Testament Studies
<i>RevQ</i>	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>
<i>SBLDS</i>	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
<i>SBLMS</i>	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
<i>SBLSCS</i>	Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies
<i>SBLSymS</i>	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
<i>SCSt</i>	Septuagint and Cognate Studies
<i>SEThV</i>	Salzburger Exegetische Theologische Vorträge
<i>SIG</i>	<i>Sylloge inscriptionum graecarum</i> . Edited by W. Dittenberger. 4 vols. 3d ed. Leipzig, 1915–24
<i>SR</i>	<i>Studies in Religion</i>
<i>SSN</i>	<i>Studia semitica neerlandica</i>
<i>STDJ</i>	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
<i>Transeu</i>	<i>Transeuphratène</i>
<i>TSAJ</i>	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
<i>UTB</i>	Uni-Taschenbücher
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>VTSup</i>	Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>WBC</i>	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WMANT</i>	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZTK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

INTRODUCTION

Lisbeth S. Fried

This volume of essays began as a question that I once asked of David Noel Freedman. I was deep in the throes of writing a commentary on Ezra–Nehemiah for his newly created Eerdmans Critical Commentary Series (now unfortunately discontinued), when I asked Noel if I had to worry about 1 Esdras. Was Ezra–Nehemiah a revision of the apocryphal 1 Esdras, or was it the other way, with 1 Esdras a revision of Ezra–Nehemiah? In typical fashion he answered that I’d have to work through the matter for myself. After much pondering, I eventually concluded that the issue was quite beyond me and that I would have to ask someone. So I asked someone; in fact, I asked eighteen of the most expert people on the planet, and they agreed to try to answer my question. First they answered it in a series of sessions at the November meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature (2007–2009) plus a session at the International SBL Meeting in Rome in the summer of 2009. Then they answered it in the articles you have before you, for the most part revisions of their talks.

In addition to the authors represented here, two others spoke at the meetings—Tessa Rajak and Arnaud Sérandour, but other responsibilities and family illnesses unfortunately kept them from contributing to this book. Sadder is Noel’s death in April of 2008. Noel presided over our first meeting in November of 2007 in San Diego and had agreed to write a response to the articles, but this was not to be.

The book consists of three parts: articles arguing against the priority of Ezra–Nehemiah, articles arguing against the priority of 1 Esdras, and articles investigating the nature of 1 Esdras. To begin with, in “Lower Criticism and Higher Criticism: The Case of 1 Esdras,” Deirdre Fulton and Gary Knoppers argue that textual criticism, or “lower criticism,” can shed light on source-critical and redaction-critical issues, in particular whether or not 1 Esdras’ Hebrew *Vorlage* was drawn from Ezra–Nehemiah. The authors focus on 1 Esd 2:15 and Ezra 4:6–11a, of which the Ezra text is by far the longer. They conclude that 1 Esdras is to be preferred. If the writer of 1 Esdras deliberately condensed a much-longer *Vorlage* of several letters—a letter to Xerxes and two more to Artaxerxes—one would

expect the work to speak summarily of a plurality of letters written during the reigns of these kings. This is not the case. In contrast, the author of Ezra could easily have wanted to show a sustained opposition to the Jews over many years and so embellished his text by adding more letters and more kings.

In “Chicken or Egg: Which Came First, 1 Esdras or Ezra–Nehemiah?” Lester Grabbe argues that 1 Esdras and Ezra–Nehemiah were composed in stages. The earliest stage is represented by chapters 2 and 5–9 of 1 Esdras (= Ezra 1:1–4:5; 5–10; Neh 8). This is the Ezra source (see graph, p. 43). The compiler of Ezra–Nehemiah split off a portion of the original Ezra tradition to form Neh 8 when he combined the chapters with the Nehemiah tradition. The author of 1 Esdras instead added the story of the three guardsmen.

Adrian Schenker elaborates on his own previous work and on that of his student, Dieter Böhler, to argue that 1 Esdras is the original version of the Ezra story. He demonstrates, first, that the narrative of the three youths is a late addition to 1 Esdras and, second, shows that 1 Esdras presents one and the same narrative twice, in two parallel stories. In contrast to the simple narrative structure of Ezra (ignoring the historicity of the order of the kings), 1 Esdras begins with a return under Cyrus and Sanabassaros (Sheshbazzar) and an authorization to rebuild the temple. Because of an intrigue, the Persian king Artaxerxes halts the repair of the city walls and market places as well as the work on the temple’s foundations. Work is stopped until the second year of Darius. The story begins again in 1 Esd 5:4 with a new return, but the name of the king is not mentioned. These returnees build the altar, lay the foundations of the temple, and commence building the temple itself. Again, enemies halt the construction until the second year of Darius. Thus, the two parallel versions of the same story were smoothed into one narrative by the author of the canonical Ezra.

Besides these articles arguing for the priority of 1 Esdras, several argue that Ezra–Nehemiah was first. In considering “The Story of the Three Youths and the Composition of 1 Esdras,” Bob Becking concludes that this story (the primary difference between the versions) provides a key as to which version was first. If 1 Esdras was first, then the story was willfully removed when Ezra–Nehemiah was compiled. If 1 Esdras was not first, then the story was added to existing material. Many commentators view the story as a late interpolation and assume that a version of 1 Esdras existed without the story. Becking takes issue with this assumption since the character of the Greek language is the same in both the story and the main body of the text. Basically the two versions differ on what allowed temple construction to begin again after it had been halted. In Ezra, it is Haggai and Zechariah’s prophesying; in 1 Esdras, in contrast, it is Zerubbabel’s winning a competition in which, for his victory prize, he reminds Darius of his vow to return the temple vessels. This competition belongs to Greek storytelling style, not Persian, and the reference to the Idumeans (4:45, 50) further demonstrates authorship in the Hasmonean period. Since the author of canonical Ezra–Nehemiah must be situated in the Persian period, it must have been written first.

In her essay, “The Second Year of Darius,” Kristin De Troyer argues that the indication of that year, “the second year of Darius,” provides a clue to the history and the relationship of MT Ezra–Nehemiah and 1 Esdras. According to MT Ezra, the temple-building project is stopped only once and is resumed only once, in the second year of Darius, by the prophetic activity of Haggai and Zechariah. The specific date on which the temple building resumes does not need to be mentioned in Ezra because it is already noted that building is halted until the second year of Darius. In contrast, building activities are stopped twice in 1 Esdras. They are started in the reign of Cyrus and stopped in the reign of Artaxerxes; they are started again in the reign of Darius and stopped once again during that king’s reign. To place the prophets in their correct year, the author of 1 Esdras needs to add (in 6:1) that it is the second year of Darius, a phrase not necessary in the canonical book. In 1 Esdras, the date acts as a resumptive clause connecting the reader back to 1 Esd 2:30 after the long insertion of the story of the three youths, the altar building, and the appearance and the rejection of the enemies.

Lisbeth Fried argues that the original story was a typical ancient Near Eastern temple-building story, but in both versions of the story, the elements were displaced to conform to the author’s ideology. Both versions displace the construction of the altar to the time before the temple is built. In Ezra the altar is built immediately upon the return of the exiles, apparently during the reign of Cyrus, whereas in 1 Esdras, it is built after the return of Zerubbabel, apparently during the reign of Darius. Both versions add the story of the stoppage of work on the temple, perhaps to explain the eighteen-year delay in temple building, from the first year of Cyrus to the second year of Darius. In Ezra, the accusing letter to Artaxerxes that stops the work is placed after Zerubbabel begins the temple-building project, whereas in 1 Esdras the letter is sent by satrapal officials, apparently of their own volition. In Ezra, Zerubbabel’s rejection of the “enemies of the Jews” is what causes the work on the temple to be stopped, whereas in 1 Esdras, the letter to Artaxerxes is written and work on the temple is stopped well before Zerubbabel even arrives in Jerusalem. Fried concludes that the components of the building story were rearranged in 1 Esdras and the story of the three youths added all in order to alleviate Zerubbabel’s responsibility for stopping the work on the temple and to provide him with an alibi. It is easier to assume that a guilty Zerubbabel was rendered innocent than it is to assume that the stoppage of temple building was moved to a point under Zerubbabel’s watch and that Zerubbabel was made the cause of the stoppage.

In “Why 1 Esdras Is Probably Not an Early Version of the Ezra–Nehemiah Tradition,” Juha Pakkala argues that Ezra–Nehemiah results from a long history of growth and revisions that have often left the text inconsistent and incoherent. First Esdras, on the other hand, is an attempt to smooth over the rough passages and clear up the inconsistencies. Among the many passages that Pakkala discusses is Ezra 4:6–11, which he suggests is rewritten in 1 Esd 2:15. The single letter that 1 Esdras reports exhibits traces of the three letters that are present in Ezra,

revealing knowledge of the Ezra text and suggesting that the 1 Esdras text is a smoothed-out version of the earlier text in Ezra. In other passages, slight pluses and slight rewordings in the Greek have the effect of giving the figure of Ezra more prestige in 1 Esdras than he receives in the Masoretic version. One may only compare Ezra 7:6 and 1 Esd 8:4, as well as the many times that Ezra is referred to as high priest, a title absent in the canonical text. It is difficult to imagine that a later version would revise a text to render Ezra less prestigious and to take away his high-priestly title.

Zipora Talshir argues again for her view that the compiler of 1 Esdras rearranged the text of Ezra–Nehemiah in order to insert the tale of the three youths. The tale was added to provide a background to the appearance of Zerubbabel and to give him more prestige than he has in the canonical book. To explain her view, Talshir shows that the process of adding stories and rearranging biblical texts is a common feature of ancient writing. The LXX of Samuel–Kings shows additions and rearrangements that fill out the canonical text, as do the Greek Daniel and Esther. Talshir demonstrates that all the features of 1 Esdras can be found in contemporary Greek versions of the biblical texts. Even the ending and beginning, which look odd to us, are similar to features in Chronicles. Chronicles, too, starts in the middle of the story of Saul’s reign and similarly ends with a verb midsentence—a sentence that is finished only in Ezra!

James VanderKam considers “Literary Questions between Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1 Esdras,” primarily the question of the role of Zerubbabel in the two texts. To VanderKam, 1 Esdras is the most ancient interpretation of the book of Ezra and the earliest attempt to cope with puzzles in it. The main puzzle the book addresses is the short shrift that Zerubbabel receives in the canonical text. Primary among the attempts to increase Zerubbabel’s presence is the addition of the story of the three youths and his inclusion in the story as the third youth. Outside the story of the youths, the author of 1 Esdras gives Zerubbabel credit along with Sheshbazzar (1 Esd 6:18) for bringing the holy temple vessels up to Jerusalem. Indeed, the fact that the passage, in both 1 Esdras and Ezra, continues with singular forms, as if Cyrus gave the vessels to just one person, and identifies this person as Sheshbazzar, betrays the secondary character of Zerubbabel’s name in 1 Esd 6:18. VanderKam adds further that the name Zerubbabel is not present here in a number of manuscript copies of 1 Esdras and is not found at this point in Josephus, *Ant.* 11.93. In comparing 1 Esd 6:27 to Ezra 6:7, and 1 Esd 6:29 to Ezra 6:8, VanderKam concludes that in both cases 1 Esdras has been expanded to include Zerubbabel. This is consistent with the idea that 1 Esdras is a revision of an older text, not a reflection of the original text itself. It is also clear that Zerubbabel is enhanced further by absorbing some of the characteristics given to Nehemiah in the older text. Quoting Talshir, VanderKam points out that the two specific requests made by Nehemiah—a letter of safe passage and a permit to procure timber—are precisely the first two things granted Zerubbabel in the letters Darius writes for him (1 Esd 4:47–48).

In “Remember Nehemiah: 1 Esdras and the *Damnatio memoriae Nehemiae*,” Jacob Wright argues that the author of 1 Esdras knew Ezra–Nehemiah as one book and that he purposely rewrote the story of Ezra to blot out Nehemiah’s memory. Nehemiah’s memoir had offended the priestly writers who composed 1 Esdras because of its insinuation that the priesthood was corrupt and had made alliances with, and had even married into, non-Israelite families. Ezra–Nehemiah also presents the city of Jerusalem in ruins until Nehemiah, a non-priest and non-Davidide, came and rebuilt it, rather than showing it built by the priests immediately upon their return. All this was rectified by a new and perfected version of the story of the return with an exalted Zerubbabel replacing Nehemiah.

Besides the question of the priority of either Ezra or 1 Esdras, several scholars investigate the nature of the book of 1 Esdras itself. In “The Image of the Kings(s) in 1 Esdras,” Sebastian Grätz shows that the portrayals of the kings, starting with Josiah and ending with Artaxerxes, are the focus of the entire book of 1 Esdras. Grätz points out that the depictions of the Persian kings in 1 Esdras mimic its portrayal of Josiah in the way that they enable the celebration of Passover and provide the temple cult with its needs. Nothing like this occurs in the canonical book of Ezra–Nehemiah. The book thus ends with Jewish autonomy under the religious and political leadership of Ezra, just as it starts with the political (and partly religious) leadership of Josiah.

In his article, “Darius’ Court and the Guardsmen’s Debate: Hellenistic Greek Elements in 1 Esdras,” Paul Harvey Jr. shows that the debates offered by the bodyguards before the great king and his court have their origin within the contexts of Greek history, historiography, and rhetoric. In particular, the title “kinsman of the king,” *συγγενής Βασιλέως* (3:7), is peculiar to Ptolemaic Egypt of the third century B.C.E., being introduced by Ptolemy II Philadelphus, who ruled 283–246 B.C.E. The term is not attested for other Hellenistic Greek monarchies, so that we have a *terminus post quem* for the story as well as a locale in Ptolemaic Egypt. Indeed, the list of officials in 1 Esd 3:7, 14 is a list of Ptolemaic honorific titles (given in order of rank) mixed with Ptolemaic administrative officers. The debate itself is a combination of two Greek literary genres: the “speeches” are in the form of deliberative/persuasive formal *logoi*, familiar from Herodotus’ debate over the best form of government (Herodotus, *Hist.* 3.80–82). This form had its home in fifth-century Athens but continued in the Hellenistic world into the Roman period. The second form is the *progymnasmata*, the student compositions on topics assigned by the classical rhetorician schoolmaster. School texts on just those subjects debated in 1 Esdras can be found in second-century papyri. These school texts and the *gymnasia* that produced them were common in all the major cities, including Ptolemaic Alexandria.

In “Cyclical Time and Catalogues: The Construction of Meaning in 1 Esdras,” Sylvie Honigman argues that in their stories of rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple after the return from destruction, both Ezra–Nehemiah and 1 Esdras display a Judean search for collective identity. The major question addressed by

these texts is: why is Darius' name associated with the temple when Cyrus, the founder of the Achaemenid Empire and of a new dynasty, should have been the one who restored the temple? The two texts address the problem differently, according to their different conceptions of time. Whereas in Ezra–Nehemiah there is a linear conception of time, in 1 Esdras time is cyclical. The many repetitions in 1 Esdras are not simply due to the arbitrary juxtaposition of parallel stories but are rather to be explained by the cyclical understanding of time. In 1 Esdras there are in each of its three stages a king; prophets; a leader of the returnees; the holy vessels; the returnees themselves; the return; a disruption; and a successful restoration of the cosmic order embodied in altar, temple, and law. Each is followed by a celebration. Of these three cycles, only the one in which Darius is king is complete. The Cyrus cycle lacks a founding ceremony and festival. The cycle of the law reading lacks a prophetic voice to initiate it. The repeated reference to Darius' second year adds cohesion to the narrative. Honigman sees the cyclical structure of the narrative as a perfect means to root the author's present firmly into the founding events of the past.

In her essay, "1 Esdras: Its Genre, Literary Form, and Goals," Sara Japhet addresses the question of the purpose of 1 Esdras, asking why it was composed. She answers by affirming that its goal was "to create a new historical picture of a certain period in the history of Israel." The period is that of the restoration, which it presents in three different phases: 1) the end of the Judean period (1 Esd 1); 2) the return from exile and the rebuilding of temple and city (1 Esd 2–7); and 3) the establishment of religious norms and practices (1 Esd 8–9). The three phases are depicted as a historical continuum, a continuum that expresses the view that the turn about of Israel's fortunes has actually been achieved; the reality of the restoration period is the wished-for salvation of Israel. The period in which the temple lay in ruins was merely a short *intermezzo*, during which the people of Israel suffered a deserved punishment for their transgressions but after which the temple was quickly rebuilt and restored to its former glory. To emphasize the continuity, 1 Esdras transfers Jerusalem's rebuilding to the beginning of the restoration period and the time of Zerubbabel. Thus, at the beginning of the restoration period the effects of exile are fully reversed, both temple and city are rebuilt and the vessels returned. The climax of the historical process is reached in the third period with the firm establishment of religious affairs under the leadership of Ezra (now labeled "high priest" [9:39]). With the leadership in the hands of a high priest, the historical development reaches the author's own time. The story thus legitimizes the political reality then current and sanctions the ideology that supported this reality.

Ralph Klein concludes in his article "The Rendering of 2 Chronicles 35–36 in 1 Esdras" that we have the original beginning to 1 Esdras and that 1 Esdras is not a fragment from the larger history of the Chronicler. The Chronicler says that Josiah had transformed the sinners of his time into people with perfect obedience, but

1 Esd 1:22 states that the people of Josiah's time persisted in sinning and acting impiously. The Chronicler says that Pharaoh Neco's archers killed Josiah (2 Chr 35:23), but according to 1 Esdras he dies of a sickness. Both of these disagreements prohibit any edition of 1 Esdras that included 2 Chr 34. Moreover, vv. 21–22 of 1 Esd 1 would not have fit in the context of 2 Chr 35, and thus there was never a corresponding Hebrew text there that later fell out. In fact, the pun that exists in the Greek—but not in the Hebrew—suggests these verses were originally written in Greek and are not a translation: that is, Josiah's piety, εὐσεβείας in v. 21, and the impiety of the people in v. 22, rendered by ἡσεβημάτων (root = ἀσεβέω). Talshir's retroversion of these words into Hebrew shows no punning at all. The first word is retroverted by her as יראת (fear) and the second by a participial form of פשע.

In "1 Esdras as Rewritten Bible?" Hugh Williamson asks why anyone would have written this work in the first place and why he would have done it in this particular form. Williamson suggests by way of an answer that 1 Esdras is an example of "rewritten Bible." He cites Geza Vermes' definition: rewritten Bible is a term that can be applied to a seemingly diverse group of texts having in common that they work through a section of the Bible, embedding that text within their presentation and simultaneously offering additional material and interpretative comments. One example is the book of Chronicles, and another is Josephus' *Antiquities*. In examining P. S. Alexander's criteria for the label "rewritten Bible," Williamson concludes that the criteria are met by 1 Esdras. Among other things, 1 Esdras is a free-standing composition that replicates, but does not supersede or replace, the canonical book on which it is based. In 1 Esdras the city is rebuilt at the time of Zerubbabel and the returnees immediately settle in it, which Williamson sees as an attempt to minimize the effects of the exile. Understanding the text as rewritten Bible, Williamson concludes, allows the reader better to appreciate what the author was trying to achieve by his selection, reordering, and re-presentation of the text.

Although a definitive resolution to the issue of the priority of 1 Esdras has not been achieved, the essays clarify the issues and increase our understanding of the goals and historical context of that book. These studies have wider ramifications, for they also elucidate the process by which the ancient authors wrote and rewrote the biblical books. Whether or not 1 Esdras was first, however, perhaps will only be resolved when Elijah returns to answer all our questions.