At its height, the Persian Empire stretched from India to Libya, uniting the entire Near East under the rule of a single Great King for the first time in history. Many groups in the area had long-lived traditions of indigenous kingship, but these were either abolished or adapted to fit the new frame of universal Persian rule. This book explores the ways in which people from Rome, Egypt, Babylonia, Israel, and Iran interacted with kingship in the Persian Empire and how they remembered and reshaped their own indigenous traditions in response to these experiences. The contributors are Björn Anderson, Seth A. Bledsoe, Henry P. Colburn, Geert De Breucker, Benedikt Eckhardt, Kiyan Foroutan, Lisbeth S. Fried, Olaf E. Kaper, Alesandr V. Makhlaiuk, Christine Mitchell, John P. Nielsen, Eduard Rung, Jason M. Silverman, Květa Smolaríková, R. J. van der Spek, Caroline Waerzeggers, Melanie Wasmuth, and Ian Douglas Wilson.

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POLITICAL MEMORY IN AND AFTER THE PERSIAN EMPIRE
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Edited by
Jason M. Silverman and Caroline Waerzeggers

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Yahweh’s Anointed: Cyrus, Deuteronomy’s Law of the King, and Yehudite Identity*

Ian Douglas Wilson (University of Alberta, Augustana Campus)

Hey, you! I am Cyrus son of Cambyses, who founded the Persian empire and was king of Asia. Do not envy my memorial.¹

I

According to the Roman historian Arrian,² Alexander the Great wished for some time to visit the tomb of Cyrus. The historian suggests that the Macedonian conqueror was a zealous devotee of the long dead Achaemenid ruler. In the story, when Alexander finally arrives at the tomb, however, he is disappointed to find it “ruined and ransacked,” despoiled and vandalized. Indeed, he is so distressed by its condition that he tortures the Magi responsible for its upkeep.³ Alexander, one might conclude, was

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1. Arrian, Anabasis Alexandrou 6.29.8. Translations are my own, unless noted otherwise.


3. But the Magi had nothing to do with it, apparently, so he lets them live. For the full account see Anabasis Alexandrou 6.29.4–11.
something of an obsessed fan. Memories of great admiration for Cyrus are abundant in the literature of the ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern world. The memories persisted for centuries, from the early Persian period itself on into late antiquity. Without a doubt, Cyrus was a shrewd politician and employed many of the practices of his imperial predecessors, his reputation as a great liberator and ecumenist notwithstanding. There is even evidence that at least some Babylonians did not remember Cyrus’s rule with fondness. Nonetheless, as Amélie Kuhrt puts it, Cyrus enjoyed very good press in the ancient world, and he continues to enjoy it today, as evinced by the Cyrus Cylinder’s highly publicized “US Tour” in 2013. The 2,600-year-old Persian king maintains political rock star status. Memories of this ancient figure have contributed much to the negotiation and formation of individual and group identities. Of course, these negotiations and formations have panned out differently and have had different sociocultural implications, in different localities in the ancient world and today.

For Greeks of the classical era, for example, Cyrus was a site of memory that provided something of a foil for outright anti-monarchic statements in political discourse, while also reinforcing the Greek commitment to anti-
authoritarianism and a kind of disciplined individualism within that same discourse. Classical historians tend to emphasize Cyrus's military genius in his capturing of Babylon, a city celebrated for its defensive structures and supposed impregnability (e.g., Herodotus, Hist. 1.177–91; Xenophon, Cyr. 7.5.1–26). The Greeks also marvel at the Persian monarch's ability to capture the love of his people. They remember him as a leader with great political savvy. Xenophon, for example, speaks very highly of Cyrus's rule and, concerning the Persian's ongoing reputation, he states, “Even today, the barbarians recount in tales and songs how Cyrus was the most handsome, most generous-spirited, most devoted to learning and most ambitious, so that he endured all kinds of hardships and submitted to all sorts of danger in order to be praised” (Cyr. 1.2.1). Herodotus likewise claims that the Persians considered Cyrus to be incomparable among men (cf. Hist. 3.160). In general, Greek literature remembers Cyrus's leadership with great esteem. He embodied, at least in part, what Rebecca Newberger Goldstein calls the Greek “Ethos of the Extraordinary,” that is, the prominent Greek ideal that “one must live so that one will be spoken about, by as many speakers as possible and for as long as possible.” That said, there is a well-known tendency in the same corpus of literature to criticize monarchy as a political institution, even in relation to Cyrus himself. Consider, for example, Herodotus's account of Cyrus's death. The historian is implicitly critical of the king's fateful dealings with the Massagetae people: Cyrus goes against the advice of the “foremost Persians” and instead follows the words of the former Lydian king Croesus, whose plan leads to full-scale conflict and to Cyrus's eventual demise (Hist. 1.201–14). Herodotus's narrative is part of a larger Greek discourse that respects and even reveres Cyrus as a king, but is nevertheless critical of the institution of kingship because of its tendency to lack discipline and to overreach its bounds of


10. On this ethos, Goldstein comments, “It is only by making oneself extraordinary that one can keep from disappearing without a trace, like some poor soul who slips beneath the ocean's waves.” See eadem, Plato at the Googleplex: Why Philosophy Won't Go Away (New York: Pantheon, 2014), 8–9; also 123–62.

11. Kuhrt, Persian Empire, 99–100, calls it a “moralising tale.”
power.12 “In a culture that was so interested in monarchy,” writes Lynette Mitchell, “where even Athenian democracy concerned itself with monarchs in democracy and democracy as monarch, Cyrus provided a convenient lens at one remove, through which the potentialities of monarchy could be tested.”13 Remembering the foremost Persian king enabled at once admiration for the strengths of a particular ruler and criticism for the institution that he embodied. The case of classical Greece involves memories of Cyrus from just beyond the reach of Persian imperial rule: historical and political ratiocinations from a people that (famously) avoided Achaemenid imperialization. But what do we find when we turn to the empire itself? How did memories of the empire’s celebrated founder impact the political discourses and identities of the peoples directly under Persian imperial rule?

In the late Persian era in Yehud—a relatively insignificant province on the western periphery of the empire, but nevertheless a significant locality for Western sociocultural history—we find a discourse not unlike the Greek one. The Yehudite discourse tends toward multivocality with regard to kingship as a political institution, and it prominently features the figure of Cyrus in its remembering of kingship, in its negotiation and formation of political identity.14 My primary goal in this essay is to work toward explicating this Yehudite discourse and the function of Cyrus-memories within it. Working toward explication, I will focus on one issue in particular: namely, how to understand the relationship between Deuteronomy’s law of the king (Deut 17:14–20) and the memories of Cyrus in Yehudite literature. There exists a strong tension between these texts: Deuteronomy strips the royal office of its conventional Near Eastern powers (horses, wives, wealth) and strongly stipulates that no foreigner may rule over the Israelites; yet the books of Isaiah and Chronicles memorialize the foreigner Cyrus as a de facto king of Israel, placing him on par with David, the great king of Israel’s monarchic era. In short, the images of Cyrus in Yehudite literature provided a minority report on what it meant to be an Israelite king.

and, by extension, what it meant to be an Israelite altogether. The hopeful visions of Cyrus provided another take on what constituted the identity of Israelite political leadership in Israel’s postmonarchic era. Thus in the social remembering of kingship in late Persian Yehud, we can observe, in at least one strand of thought, a hybridization of Yehudite political identity, in which the Great King of Persia was “Davidized” in such a way that the identity of Israelite kingship (and Israelite/Yehudite identity in general) could be maintained in an imperial milieu.

II

Following the work of Barry Schwartz, who draws on the influential cultural anthropology of Clifford Geertz, I understand social memory as a cultural system that functions as a model of and a model for society.15 Social memory or remembering, like the widespread literary memorialization of Cyrus one finds in the ancient world, acts as a “template that organizes and animates behavior and a frame within which people locate and find meaning for their present experience.”16 Schwartz, working on American memory and politics, shows time and again how memories and images of Abraham Lincoln have been consciously and unconsciously recycled to frame the society’s remembering of later political leaders—like John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr., for example—and how perceptions of these later figures have (re)shaped understandings of Lincoln’s role(s) in America’s past. An example relevant for scholars of the ancient Near Eastern world is Saddam Hussein’s attempts in the 1990s to align himself with memories of Mesopotamian kings and emperors.17 Another


17. Hussein actually installed bricks at the base of Babylon’s ancient walls with Cuneiform inscriptions that read, “In the era of President Saddam Hussein, the President of Iraq, God preserve him, who rebuilt Babylon, as protector of the great Iraq and the builder of civilization.” See Douglas Jehl, “Look Who’s Stealing Nebuchadnezzar’s Thunder,” New York Times (2 June 1997); online: http://www.nytimes.com/1997/06/02/
scholar, Jeffrey Olick, states that social remembering “express[es] neither the past nor the present but the changing interactions between past and present: Past meanings are malleable to varying degrees and present circumstances exploit these potentials more or less.” In other words, when a Persian-, Hellenistic-, or Roman-era (or later) society invoked memories of Cyrus the Great, the society saw something in Cyrus that spoke to its present condition and its future hopes and desires, or else the society never would have recalled him in the first place. But at the same time, present discourse shaped and reshaped understandings of Cyrus as part of the society’s past. This generates, in a particular milieu, a discursive feedback loop that cycles from past to present to future and vice versa. All that said, it is important to note that social remembering, though sometimes it is consciously manipulated for propagandistic purposes, often works unconsciously and organically. Indeed, this is how human cognition functions: the brain makes links between memories and experiences with apparent affinities, which model one another in the mind’s perception. Societies do something similar when trying to work out the interrelationship between the shared past, its potential meanings and its import in the present. Social memory and remembering, then, is a complex process of signification, in which symbolic links are created over and through time and space in order to make sense of the moment at hand, in order to approach questions such as: Who are we? Where have we come from? Where are we going? And who are we to become?—questions of identity. Narratives are,
thus, also an essential aspect of social memory. Social remembering necessarily generates, and is informed by, communally shared and constructed narratives—(hi)stories that continually shape identity and vice versa.

Turning now to political memory, imagination, and identity in the province of Yehud, one finds a society with a corpus of literature—a corpus that goes to great lengths recounting, glorifying, and critiquing its monarchical past as well as the import of this past for the present and future. 20 It

20. This statement naturally raises the questions: What literature? What evidence do we have to work with for this period? And how do we know? Unfortunately, answers to these questions are plagued by dangers of circular argumentation and by necessary speculation, but we have some good ideas nonetheless. Below I provide some additional notes on the specific books I deal with in this essay, but some general comments are necessary here. Recent work on the compositional history of the Hebrew Bible suggests that the conditions of possibility for many of its books are to be found in the late Persian/early Hellenistic era, during the fourth and early third centuries B.C.E. (I put “early Hellenistic” in brackets because, in the southern Levant at least, there was general continuity in settlement patterns and governmental administrative systems from the Achaemenids to Alexander to the Ptolemies, and widespread Hellenistic sociocultural influence was not manifest until well into the third century B.C.E. and later; cf. Oded Lipschits and Oren Tal, “The Settlement Archaeology of the Province of Judah,” in Judah and the Judeans in the Fourth Century B.C.E. [ed. O. Lipschits et al.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2007], 33–52). This is not to deny that these books are composite works of literature that drew on much older source-texts, nor is it to say that issues of composition history are entirely settled in biblical studies (they likely never will be). The point is, the “textualization”/“scripturalization”/“codification”/“proto-canonization”/“stabilization” (pick your terminological poison) of many of the Hebrew Bible’s books likely occurred in the sociocultural milieu of late Persian Yehud. These books include the Pentateuch; Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings (i.e., the “Deuteronomistic” books or “Former Prophets”); the prophetic books (i.e., the “Latter Prophets”); and Chronicles; inter alia. Codified as works of literature in the late Persian era, these books are literary artifacts from that period, and their discourses (those within each book and those that stretch across the boundaries of books) reflect the discourses of the community that produced and maintained them. For examples of scholarship that support this stance on the books’ primary milieu (but with different approaches, aims, and outcomes), see Lester Grabbe, “The Law, the Prophets, and the Rest: The State of the Bible in Pre-Maccabean Times,” DSD 13 (2006): 319–38; Reinhard Achenbach, “The Pentateuch, the Prophets, and the Torah in the Fifth and Fourth Centuries B.C.E.,” in Judah and the Judeans in the Fourth Century B.C.E., 253–85; Ehud Ben Zvi, “Reconstructing the Intellectual Discourse of Ancient Yehud,” SR 39 (2010): 7–23; David M. Carr, The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 221–24; and also the very recent essay by Diana Edelman, “Introduction,” in Deuteronomy–Kings as Emerging Authoritative
is important to emphasize here that Yehud was certainly not Babylon or Egypt, nor was it Athens; the literati of Yehud—who were responsible for the production and maintenance of Yehudite literature such as the books of Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and Chronicles—were a very small and politically insignificant group on the outskirts of an imperial world. This imperial backwater had suffered great devastation from the Neo-Babylonian conquests of the early sixth century, and its population and economy never really recovered during the Neo-Babylonian/early Persian period (the sixth and fifth centuries). Even in the late Persian/early Hellenistic era (the fourth and third centuries) the entire province was home to no more than 30,000—and as few as 15,000—persons, and its sociocultural and political center, Jerusalem, was home to only 1,000 or so. Moreover, literacy rates were extremely low in the ancient Near East—one percent at best and probably even lower—and a high level of reading comprehension was limited to sociocultural “elites,” that is, royal and cultic functionaries, persons with extensive formal education. In the case of Yehud, then, we are talk-

Books: A Conversation (ed. D. V. Edelman; ANEM 6; Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical, 2014), 1–25. That said, I should also emphasize that this is not to say these books were completely stabilized by the late Persian period. The texts remained fluid to a certain extent throughout antiquity, and in some cases may have circulated in different versions (cf. LXX Jeremiah). Carr, Formation, 180–203; and also Konrad Schmid, The Old Testament: A Literary History (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 183–209; have recently argued that some of these books may have been expanded and/or edited in a third-century, Hellenistic milieu. However, as Carr acknowledges, spotting potential Hellenistic-era expansions in these books, which are more or less Persian-era compositions, is extremely difficult (Formation, 188).


22. Cf. Christopher A. Rollston, Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel: Epigraphic Evidence from the Iron Age (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical, 2010), 132–34. Rollston’s study focuses on the Iron Age, but his observations are applicable to the Persian period as well, when literacy was, without doubt, even less common. See also Ehud Ben Zvi, “Introduction: Writings, Speeches, and the Prophetic Books—Set-
ing about a very minimal number of highly literate persons who were traders of the literature. This is important to keep in mind because it suggests that various and competing “schools” or multiple and independent “factions” most likely did not exist in Persian Yehud. Instead, it is much more likely that a single group of highly literate individuals, who worked and lived together closely, debated and embraced a number of diverse and sometimes divergent ideas about history—past, present, and future—drawing on these ideas in their constructions of identity. Notably, one may observe a similar phenomenon in late Persian- and Hellenistic-era Babylon, where one finds different opinions in different narrative forms within the “active lifespan” of the Babylonian library at Esagil; it seems that, for the literati there, remembering the transition from Babylonian kingship to Persian rule presented a “hermeneutical problem” that allowed for multiple and divergent interpretations of the past. To explain away multivocality or tensions in the discourse by simply assigning different strands of thought to separate ideologically/theologically minded groups within the Yehudite population is, therefore, unfounded.


24. It is not impossible, of course, but it is extremely unlikely.


26. Although here I am emphasizing the social mnemonics of literature within a literary culture, it is important not to forget that this society lived in an actual locale, with its own geographical and physical features that would have contributed to social memory as well. For example, the ruins of Persian-era Jerusalem, with its destroyed temple and palace structures and its depleted economy, would have (re)shaped political memories past and future. For a recent study of Jerusalem in this vein, see Daniel D. Pioske, David’s Jerusalem: Between Memory and History (New York: Routledge, 2015). Moreover, the grandeur of Persian kingship was not far away. The palatial structure of Ramat Rahel, only a few short kilometers from Jerusalem, boasted impressive “royal” architecture and an exotic garden, and was probably the Persian governor’s residence.
III

Immersing oneself in Yehudite literature, one quickly observes certain multivocality or polyvalence concerning the institution of kingship as part of Yehud’s past. As mentioned, Deut 17:14–20 allows for and forecasts kingship in the land of Israel, yet it offers a very unconventional vision of the office, which does not accord with ancient Near Eastern standards. Moreover, the very kingly things that Deuteronomy prohibits (horses, wives, wealth) and the political powers they represent (war, diplomacy, economy) serve in part as cause for celebration in the memories of Davidic kingship. One cannot have an effective army without horses, and one cannot build a palace or a temple without wealth. Solomon, indeed, receives direct criticism for his love of foreign women (1 Kgs 11:1–5), but his acquisition of horses and chariots (from Egypt no less!) and his amassing of impressive wealth is praised in Yehud’s historiographical books of Kings and Chronicles (1 Kgs 5:6; 10:10–29; 2 Chr 9:22–31). To complicate matters further, it is Yahweh, the deity responsible for Deuteronomic law in the first place, who grants Solomon his wealth and prestige (1 Kgs 3:13). “Solomon’s opulence, power, and international trade,” argues Gary Knoppers, “are regarded as signs of divine favor in the Deuteronomistic History”—not Deuteronom(ist)ic criticisms.27 The problem of Solomon and his wives and possessions is only one example. There are tensions in the

—and the seat of imperial administration for the province. See Oded Lipschits et al., “Palace and Village, Paradise and Oblivion: Unravelling the Riddles of Ramat Rahel,” Near Eastern Archaeology 74 (2011): 2–49; and Oded Lipschits, Yuval Gadot, and D. Langgut, “The Riddle of Ramat Rahel: The Archaeology of a Royal Persian Period Edifice,” Transeu 41 (2012): 57–79. At Ramat Rahel, the glories of the Persian empire and present-day Persian kingship (and also foreign kingship in general) would have stood juxtaposed with memories of Judahite/Israelite kingship past and future. These physical sites of memory are not the focus of this essay, but they are worth mentioning as important issues to keep in mind for the study of Yehudite identity in the late Persian era.

Yehudite literature’s representations of dynasty (Davidic and otherwise), of Yahweh’s kingship, of the people’s power vis-à-vis kingship, of the utility and viability of kingship over time, etc. These issues provide a never ending supply of thorny problems for historians interested in the milieu of Yehud, and the roots of the issues stretch from the Deuteronomic king-law to the multiple and various representations of kingship in Yehud’s historiographical and prophetic books.

In Deut 17:15 we find the root of the problem at hand: the question of the king’s Israelite identity.\(^\text{28}\) After forecasting that the people of Israel

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\(^{28}\) The book of Deuteronomy, as a whole, bridges concerns of sociocultural/(ethnic) and geopolitical/(national) identities. It is concerned with the definition of, interrelationship between, and maintenance of cultural and geographical boundaries in ancient Israel/(Judah). Cf. E. Theodore Mullen Jr., *Narrative History and Ethnic Boundaries: The Deuteronomistic Historian and the Creation of Israelite National Identity* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1993), 55–85. Most scholars tend to situate the composition of the book in the postmonarchic era, even though some of its texts may have origins in Israel’s/Judah’s monarchic period (Juha Pakkala and Nathan MacDonald cover the major issues in a series of articles in ZAW 121–123 [2009–2011]; see also the recent and cogent essay by Philip R. Davies, “The Authority of Deuteronomy,” in *Deuteronomy-Kings as Emerging Authoritative Books*, 27–47). Indeed, as C. L. Crouch argues in her recent work, many of the sociocultural concerns and debates reflected in the book likely have their roots in the late Iron Age, during Judah’s monarchic period, especially in the seventh century B.C.E. (*The Making of Israel: Cultural Diversity in the Southern Levant and the Formation of Ethnic Identity in Deuteronomy* [VTSup 162; Leiden: Brill, 2014]; cf. Ian Douglas Wilson, “Judean Pillar Figurines and Ethnic Identity in the Shadow of Assyria,” *JSOT* 36 [2012]: 259–78, which investigates the role of material culture in Judah’s identity discourse during the Neo-Assyrian era). Nevertheless, *pace* Crouch, I seriously doubt that Deuteronomy’s king-law in particular was extant in the monarchic era (see Crouch, *Making of Israel*, 177–84). It is difficult to see how a strongly political text such as Deut 17:14–17 would have had any cultural capital among literati in monarchic Judah, who were almost certainly associated in some way with the actual Judahite king. Do we know of any highly literate groups in the ancient Near East who were not directly connected to and in support of the political powers that be? In what monarchic-period social context would the production of such a text likely have taken place? In other words, why would the literati bite the hand that fed them? This, to me, is the biggest problem for any attempt to date the king-law to the monarchic era, and the problem often goes unaddressed by scholars who see the king-law as a monarchic-era text (e.g., Bernard M. Levinson, “The Reconceptualization of Kingship in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History’s Transformation of Torah,” *VT* 51 [2001]: 511–34; and recently, Baruch Halpern, “Between
will eventually request a king, the law states: “You may indeed set over you a king, whom Yahweh your God will choose. From among your brothers you may set over you a king; you may not put over you a foreigner, who is not one of your brothers.” The Israelites may have the political office of king, as do other nations, but Yahweh has specific ideas concerning the nature of the office. First of all, Yahweh himself will “choose” (בָּחַר) the king, just as he chose/will choose the people themselves (e.g., Deut 4:37; 7:6; 10:15; etc.), the central place of worship (e.g., Deut 12:5; 14:23; 16:2, etc.), and the levitical servants and priesthood (e.g., Deut 18:5; 21:5). C. L. Crouch writes, “If Israel’s king cannot be distinguished from non-Israelite kings in his royal capacity as such, he should be distinguished by virtue of the Israelite deity who renders him royal.”²⁹ The king is to be an exclusive Yahwist by association (Yahweh alone chooses him) and by practice (he devotes himself solely to Yahweh via the Torah; cf. Deut 17:19). Moreover, the king is to be from Israel exclusively. The law leaves no doubt about this, giving both positive and negative commands concerning the king’s family lineage: he is to be from among the Israelites (“your brothers”) and not a foreigner (נָכָר). Notice that the prohibition uses the particularly forceful verb לא תוכל (“you may not/are not allowed”).³⁰ Notice, too, in Deut 17:20, the law places the successful king and dynasty בַּקְרֵי יְשָׁרָאֵל (“in the midst of Israel”), a phrase with great import for the discourse (more below). The no-foreigner stipulation—which one would think goes with-

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²⁹. Crouch, Making of Israel, 179; cf. Assnat Bartor, Reading Law as Narrative: A Study in the Casuistic Laws of the Pentateuch (SBLAIL 5; Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 47.

out saying—is obviously and directly related to issues of social identity and points to a discourse concerned with international politics.

Within Yehudite literature, this sets the stage for narratives that have a pronounced negative take on foreign influences on the monarchy, including Jezebel the Phoenician’s marriage to Ahab (1 Kgs 16:29–33)\(^{31}\) and Ahaz’s submission to Tiglash-pileser III, which makes the Assyrian Judah’s overlord (2 Kgs 16:7–9).\(^{32}\) In any case, the prohibition on foreigners in the office of king, in the words of Andrew Mayes, “strengthen[s] the positive demand that the king must be a member of the covenant people.”\(^{33}\)

Within the milieu of Persian Yehud, then, the stipulation helped define and defend the boundaries of Yehudite identity with regard to ideally imagined political leadership in a postmonarchic, imperialized milieu. It helped conceive at least one vision of kingship that was wholly Yahwistic and wholly “Israelite,” within an ancient Near Eastern political climate dominated by non-Israelite power. By the late Persian period, Yehud had been under the control of imperial governance for several centuries. The prohibition of foreign kings, as codified in the book of Deuteronomy, framed memory of Israelite kingship past (good and bad), and it guided imagination of ideal kingship future. It functioned both as a prefatory note on what Israelite kingship should have and should not have been in Yehud’s monarchic past and as an abstract ideal for any conceptualization of Israelite kingship in Yehud’s present and future.

With the law, for instance, Yehudites would have found support for partly blaming outsiders for Yehud’s present sociopolitical condition: doubtless, the law justified readings of the literature that would emphasize the impact of foreign figures—like Solomon’s wives, for example, or Mesopotamian emperors—on the eventual downfall of Judah’s kingdom in the past. To be sure, in Yehudite historiographical literature, a foreign king never actually sits directly on Israel’s or Judah’s throne. By marrying


\(^{33}\) Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, 272.
into the Israelite/Judahite royal line or by ruling over Israel/Judah from afar, however, the foreigner attains some level of power within the Israelite/Judahite political realm. In other words, from this mnemonic perspective: if only the Israelite kingship had avoided foreign influence and connections, the litany of apostasies that eventually led to the kingdom’s collapse might never have happened. Note, for example, how Chronicles depicts Ahaz’s apostasy as a corollary of his turning to foreign aid in a moment of desperation (2 Chr 28:22). Of course, Yehudite literati could not have seen foreign influence as an excuse for the kings of old—they could not remove any blame from the past leaders of Israel and Judah—for, according to Yehudite historiography, Torah had always warned the Israelites and Judahites of the disastrous effects of outside influence (e.g., 2 Kgs 17:13–21).

Also, for the Persian-period community, the law, along with anti-foreigner tendencies in Yehudite historiography, established a precedent for

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34. This is part of Chronicles’s tendency to keep foreigners and Israelites categorically separate. In Chronicles, there are seemingly only insiders and outsiders; making political alliances represents a grey area that goes against the book’s ideological grain (cf. Sara Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought* [trans. Anna Barber; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2009 (original 1989)], 261–74). One finds a similar system of thought in Assyria, where the king was understood to be the only person capable of and necessary for his divinely appointed tasks: to make alliances, as weak foreign kings did, was to question the absolute power of Assur and the Assyrian pantheon (cf. Mario Liverani, “The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire,” in *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires* [ed. Mogens Trolle Larsen; Mesopotamia 7; Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979], 297–317, 310–11; also C. L. Crouch, *War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East: Military Violence in Light of Cosmology and History* [BZAW 407; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009], 38–48 and passim). This tendency is also present, to a certain extent, in the Deuteronomistic books (cf. Nadav Na’amany, “The Deuteronomist and Voluntary Servitude to Foreign Powers,” *JSOT* 65 [1995]: 37–53). There are, however, notable exceptions that challenge the trend. Asa’s alliance with Ben-Hadad of Aram, for example, receives some criticism in the literature (1 Kgs 15:18–20; cf. 2 Chr 16:7–13), but on the whole the king’s life and deeds garner a very positive assessment (cf. 1 Kgs 15:9–15; 2 Chr 14:1; 15:16–17; cf. 20:32). Moreover, Hiram/Huram of Tyre is portrayed as an unquestionably positive foreign influence on the Israelite monarchy in both Sam–Kings and Chronicles (e.g., 2 Sam 5:11//1 Chr 14:1; 1 Kgs 5:21–22; 2 Chr 2:10–11; etc.). As an ally of David and Solomon, he helps advance Israel’s economic power, supplies builders and building supplies for the Jerusalem temple, and even blesses Yahweh. And as I argue below, Cyrus’s role at the end of Chronicles likewise blurs the boundaries of insider/outsider and subverts the book’s tendency to keep foreigners separate.
any and all future Israelite kings imagined in the literature. Any king over Israel was to be a Yahwist and an Israelite—or he was nothing. This was obviously true for the images of Yahweh as king, as it was for the various depictions of a future Davidide. One thinks of the “shoot” from the “stump of Jesse” in Isa 11, for example: this Davidide is imagined as one who will rule, under Yahweh’s aegis, with superhuman senses. He is a type of ruler the world has never seen, who rules with divine olfaction\(^{35}\) and who wipes out enemies with mouth and breath (Isa 11:1–5). Within Isa 10–12, this future king is juxtaposed with the Assyrian tyrant in such a way that promotes a unique vision of Israelite kingship vis-à-vis kingship as the world knows it.\(^{36}\) Imagining a king who brought justice to the lowly and who struck down the wicked is not out of the ordinary,\(^{37}\) but the means by which the Davidide would accomplish this is unusual, especially when one compares it with the depiction of Assyria in the preceding chapter, within the same sequence of oracles. Assyria wields the mighty staff with his hand (10:5; cf. 10:13), not his mouth (cf. 11:4), and he relies on his own wisdom (10:13) not wisdom granted by Yahweh (cf. 11:2). Isaiah 11 takes a somewhat ordinary or expected idea of kingship in the ancient Near East and recasts it with an extraordinary vision. Yahweh’s goals for the Davidide are

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35. On the difficult phrase הוריחו ביראת יהוה in Isa 11:3, see Jeremiah Unterman, “The (Non)sense of Smell in Isaiah 11:3,” HS 33 (1992): 17–23; and Arie Shifman, “‘A Scent’ of the Spirit: Exegesis of an Enigmatic Verse (Isaiah 11:3),” JBL 131 (2012): 241–49. Unterman encourages textual emendation ("הוריחו" [“and it shall teach him”]), and Shifman suggests that הוריח ("scent/smell") should be interpreted metaphorically to indicate the Davidide’s supreme discernment. I take the phrase as is, in line with the superhuman nature of the Davidide throughout the passage.


standard: peace, justice, righteousness. But the means of accomplishing those goals are not. The Davidide has no strong arm, no armies run by lesser, subservient kings, but he will succeed nonetheless, with his preternatural gifts. The passage subverts ancient Near Eastern conventions of power and in doing so promotes Yahweh’s absolute control over the cosmos—a vision that is, ideologically, not unlike that of Deut 17:14–20. For those Yehudites framing their memories of kingship (past or future) with Deuteronomic law in mind, the king of Israel was to be Israelite in terms of his lineage, a part of Yahweh’s covenant people, which set him apart from other kings, and he was also to be distinct in his method of rule, thus making the practice of Israelite kingship unique.

IV

Now, thus far I have sidestepped a key question: What exactly is an Israelite? Or better: How did Yehudite literati speak to each other about what being an Israelite actually means? This is a question that I can hardly begin to approach here in this essay, but nonetheless I hope to show how the discourse on kingship stretches (or blurs) the boundaries of Israelite identity as it is conceived in Deuteronomy’s law of the king and elsewhere in the Yehudite corpus of literature. Cyrus is our parade example. Although the literature never refers to the Persian as “king of Israel,” Yehudite readers of the books of Isaiah and Chronicles certainly construed him as


39. In Isaiah, Cyrus features prominently in the so-called “Second Isaiah” or
such. The figure of Cyrus plays the part of Israelite king both linguistically and thematically, forcing readers to rethink Deuteronomy’s king-law and its prohibition on foreigners ruling Israel.

First, Cyrus is Yahweh’s “shepherd” (רעה, Isa 44:28). The metaphor of king as shepherd is ubiquitous in the ancient Near East. In the Yehudite discourse in particular it has a strong association with David, the foremost human king in Yehud’s social memory. In David’s youth, he is literally a herder of sheep (1 Sam 17:15), and after his accession Yahweh charges him to shepherd Israel, the deity’s chosen people (1 Sam 5:2//1 Chr 11:2; cf. Ps 78:70–72). The prophetic books, situated as authoritative voices from

“Deutero-Isaiah” (Isa 40–55): he is perhaps the section’s central figure and may even have served as the framework for its initial composition and subsequent redactions (see, e.g., John D. W. Watts, Isaiah 34–66 [WBC 25; Waco: Word Books, 1987], 109–79; Reinhard G. Kratz, Kyros im Deuterojesaja-Buch: Redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Entstehung und Theologie von Jes 40–55 [FAT 1; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991]; Joseph Blenkinsopp, David Remembered: Kingship and National Identity in Ancient Israel [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2013], 64–70). The texts of Second Isaiah may be products of the sixth, fifth, or even fourth century (see, e.g., the various views of Philip R. Davies, “God of Cyrus, God of Israel: Some Religio-Historical Reflections on Isaiah 40–55,” in Words Remembered, Texts Renewed: Essays in Honour of John F. A. Sawyer [ed. Jon Davies, Graham Harvey, and Wilfred G. E. Watson; JSOTSup; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995], 207–25; Lisbeth S. Fried, “Cyrus the Messiah? The Historical Background to Isaiah 45:1,” HTR 95 [2002]: 373–93; Rainer Albertz, “Darius in Place of Cyrus: The First Edition of Deutero-Isaiah (Isaiah 40.1–52.12) in 521 BCE,” JSOT 27 [2003]: 371–83; Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, For the Comfort of Zion: The Geographical and Theological Location of Isaiah 40–55 [VTSup 139; Leiden: Brill, 2011], 13–51; Simeon Chavel, “Prophetic Imagination in the Light of Narratology and Disability Studies in Isaiah 40–48,” Journal of Hebrew Scriptures 14 [2014]: article 3 [online: http://www.jhsonline.org]). However, it is widely acknowledged among scholars that the book of Isaiah—of which the scholarly construct of “Second Isaiah” is only one part—is to be situated within the milieu of the late Persian period, post 400 B.C.E. and prior to the full advent of Hellenism in the Levant. Given evidence from Qumran, the LXX, and Ben Sira, the terminus ad quem for the book is the early second century. But 2 Chr 32:32 reasonably allows one to push the date further back, probably into the fourth century (see, e.g., Blenkinsopp, Isaiah 1–39, 84), since Chronicles likely emerged in the late Persian/(early Hellenistic) period as well (see Gary N. Knoppers, 1 Chronicles 1–9 [AB 12; New York: Doubleday, 2003], 101–17, with detailed discussion of Chronicles’ date and additional references). To be clear, as I noted above, the point is not to disregard the books’ compositional histories, but to emphasize that these books, including their contents in toto, may be thought of as literary artifacts from late Persian Yehud, sources for the study of that particular time period and discursive locality.
Yehud’s past, can be critical of these shepherds of people, but they nevertheless look forward to a David-like shepherd who will rule justly and rightly. The depiction of Cyrus clearly signifies the good shepherd. The Persian king is also Yahweh’s “anointed” (משיח, Isa 45:1). Like being Yahweh’s shepherd, being anointed by Yahweh as king also carries a caveat: it does not guarantee success per se (after all, Saul is a “messiah” too; see 1 Sam 10:1; 12:3; 24:7; etc.). It does, however, connote an exalted, divinely adopted king, even the deity’s own son, whom the deity knows personally and for whom the deity fights, especially in conjunction with Davidic kingship. Consider, for instance, Pss 2, 18, and 20 (and, with qualification, Ps 89). Cyrus, like the king of these psalms, is also a משיח whom Yahweh knows and for whom Yahweh fights, as Isa 45:1–7 clearly states. Yahweh grasps Cyrus by his right hand (ימין) so that he may conquer and humiliate.

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42. It is clear that Yahweh knows Cyrus, but some scholars maintain that, in this passage, Cyrus does not know or even acknowledge the deity (see NRSV and cf. Braun, “Cyrus in Second Isaiah,” 148–49; John Goldingay and David Payne, Isaiah 40–55 [2 vols.; ICC; London: T&T Clark, 2006], 2:24–26 [cf. John Goldingay, The Message of Isaiah 40–55: A Literary-Theological Commentary (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 265–68]; Mitchell, “Remembering Cyrus,” 284). Isaiah 45:4–5 twice states that Cyrus did/does not know Yahweh, but this likely refers to the state of their relationship prior to Yahweh’s call to service. In both verses, the negated qatal verb לא ידעתני (“you did/do not know me”) stands in juxtaposition with the preceding yiqtol verbs. The Hebrew thus places Cyrus’s lack of knowledge in the past, with either a perfective or pluperfective aspect (cf. LXX, Luther Bibel, KJV, NJPS; Joseph Blenkinsopp, Isaiah 40–55 [AB 19A; New York: Doubleday, 2002], 244). The verses do not necessarily imply that Cyrus continued to be ignorant of the deity after he became the deity’s servant (pace Goldingay, who seems hesitant to place Cyrus in the role of servant in the first place). In any case, Cyrus calls Yahweh by name in 2 Chr 36:23, even calling him “God of the heavens” (cf. Ezra 1:2). Yehudites/Judeans thus remembered Cyrus as one who came to know his role as a servant of their universal deity. Cf. also Nebuchadnezzar’s portrayal in the later text of Dan 4. The Babylonian king, also remembered as Yahweh’s “servant,” finally submits to the Judean deity, exclaiming, “I … praise, exalt, and glorify the King of Heaven!” (Dan 4:34). N.B. by remembering Nebuchadnezzar in the book of Daniel, Judean literati effectively forgot the figure of Nabonidus (see Carol A. Newsom, “Now You See Him, Now You Don’t: Nabonidus in Jewish Memory,” in Remembering Biblical Figures, 270–82).
lesser kings, all for the glory of Yahweh. Lisbeth Fried argues, “The term ‘YHWH’s anointed’ is more than a title. It connotes a theology. It refers to the legitimate Judean ruler, divinely installed, divinely protected, even numinous.” By handing over this title to Cyrus, the discourse also hands over all of the title’s theological implications. The same is true for the title of “shepherd.” To be sure, if Cyrus were called merely “shepherd” or “messiah” alone, then the connection with David would be uncertain or perhaps even unlikely. But the fact that Cyrus is cast at once as the specially chosen shepherd of the deity’s people and as one anointed by the deity, in a passage that is so strongly reminiscent of Davidic and royal psalms, suggests that Yehudites remembered Cyrus with David in mind.

43. Notice, too, that in this image Cyrus is reminiscent of the elevated king in Ps 110, who sits at Yahweh’s right hand and whose enemies Yahweh crushes. See Ps 110:1, 5; cf. Ps 18:36; 20:7; 89:14, 26 (contrast 89:43). In Isaiah, to be sure, Cyrus lacks the priestly element famously emphasized in Ps 110:4. The depiction of Cyrus and Persian kingship in Ezra does, however, include something of a priestly element. See note 47 below.


46. Of course, classifying and representing the foreign emperor in local rubrics was not limited to the Yehudite context. In Egypt, for example, at the temple of Neith in Sais, Cambyses is dubbed “King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Mesuti-Re [Offspring of Re],” and on the walls of the Hibis temple in the Kharga oasis Darius is represented as Pharaoh. See Fried, “Cyrus the Messiah?” 383–85. Persia’s long and complicated relationship with Egypt engendered a blend of imperial ideology and political pragmatism that manifested itself in different ways (from the Egyptian perspective as well as the Persian), depending upon the specific sociohistorical and political situations under each Persian ruler. Cf. Damien Agut-Labordere, “The Fluctuation in the Relationship between Persian Kingship and the Egyptians during the First Persian Domination (526–ca. 404 BC),” at the symposium. The famous Cyrus Cylinder, mentioned above, is another example, which, drawing on conventional Mesopotamian royal ideology, presents the Persian conqueror as a loyal servant of Marduk. Although modern readers of this text (scholarly and otherwise) have tended to see the Cylinder as a testament to Cyrus’s charity and goodwill, it more likely represents “a manifesto of
Further strengthening this mnemonic link with David, the Yehudite image of Cyrus takes part in the prominent leitmotif of temple. The book of Isaiah recounts how Yahweh charges the Persian king, his servant and anointed shepherd, with restoring the temple in Jerusalem in order to reunite the people of Israel with Yahweh there (Isa 44:24–28; cf. 45:13). In Chronicles, too, there is a strong thematic link between the temple, David and Solomon, and Cyrus: the temple is David’s initiative (1 Chr 17), passed down to his son Solomon (1 Chr 28), and Chronicles’ historiography concludes with Cyrus restoring the Davidic initiative, as per Yahweh’s command (2 Chr 36:22–23). Of course, the leitmotif of temple and Davidic kingship is present in the Deuteronomistic books as well (2 Sam 7; 1 Kgs 8), but there are some differences worth mentioning. In Samuel–Kings, David’s line is promised a place on the throne of Israel “forever” (2 Sam 7:12–16) and his son Solomon builds Yahweh’s temple. But their posterity ends up exiled in Babylon (2 Kgs 25:27–30; cf. Jer 52:31–34) with no explicit mention of restoration or rebuilding the destroyed Jerusalem. In


47. See also Ezra 1, which contains a verbatim parallel to 2 Chr 36:22–23. Biblical scholarship has tended to focus on the interdependence of the two texts, which came first, etc., with many arguing that Chronicles borrowed the text from Ezra (e.g., Braun, “Cyrus in Second Isaiah,” 152, 154–55). I see Ezra as a distinct composition from Chronicles (cf. Knoppers, I Chronicles 1–9, 93–100), and I am not so sure that it was part of Yehud’s literary corpus, at least not in the form of anything close to the book we have now (note that Ben Sira fails to mention Ezra in his catalogue of famous men: Sir 44–50; cf. James W. Watts, “Scripturalization and the Aaronide Dynasties,” JHS 13 [2013]: article 6, esp. pp. 8–15 [online: http://www.jhsonline.org]; Lisbeth S. Fried, Ezra and the Law in History and Tradition [Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2014], 28). In any case, the details found in Ezra would not alter the trajectory of my argument. In fact, bringing Ezra into the discussion would only strengthen it. In Chronicles, Cyrus falls in line with a glorified David, Yahweh’s specially chosen regent and temple builder; in Ezra, this same Persian king, with the same declaration of temple building for Yahweh, begins the narrative of a new epoch in Yehud, an epoch that eventually witnesses the official (re)establishment of Torah in Jerusalem (cf. Ezra 7). In effect, then, the book of Ezra brings Cyrus and his fellow Persian kings more in line with Deuteronomy’s king-law, since they become responsible for the successful promulgation of Torah among the Judeans.
Chronicles, on the other hand, the *regency* of David's kingship is emphasized (not its "foreverness"); kingship is positioned underneath the universal and eternal rule of the deity, and the narrative concludes with Cyrus becoming regent and filling the void left by the exiled Davidic line. Cyrus's appointment as temple builder creates a literary bridge back to Solomon and David: in the words of Louis Jonker, “What has been lost through a whole series of Judahite kings not doing right in the eyes of Yahweh will be regained by Cyrus the Persian.” At the end of Kings, then, one finds an actual Davidide living in the court of Babylon, far from his throne, while in Chronicles one finds a Davidized foreigner standing in

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Persia as Yahweh’s chosen hero, the one to restore Israel and its cult in the proper place of Jerusalem. This is a significant statement.

In sum, in Yehudite literature, Cyrus—remembered as the one who defeated Babylon and restored Israel to its promised land and city—is imagined as the prototypical and ideal Davidide: Yahweh’s shepherd and temple builder, the foremost Israelite king. The Persian is cast in the same

51. The end of Kings an sich is mostly pessimistic. At best, Jehoiachin’s exalted place in the Babylonian court mitigates the severe tragedy of Judah’s destruction and exile; at worst, it is an ironic indictment of the failed Davidic king, whose line is supposed to remain “forever” on the throne in Jerusalem (see 2 Kgs 25:28; and compare 2 Sam 7:13). Read within the larger context of Yehudite literature, however, it perhaps has a positive outlook. For instance, Michael Chan in a recent article argues that the observed intertextual relationship between 2 Kgs 25:27–30 and Gen 40–41 suggests that Kings’ conclusion points to a forthcoming exodus from Babylon back to Jerusalem, i.e., the reversal of exile (“Joseph and Jehoiachin: On the Edge of Exodus,” ZAW 125 [2013]: 566–77; see also Ian Douglas Wilson, “Joseph, Jehoiachin, and Cyrus: On Book Endings, Exoduses and Exiles, and Yehudite/Judean Social Remembering,” ZAW 126 [2014]: 521–34). Thus, in terms of theme and outlook, the conclusions to Kings and Chronicles are indeed similar. The major difference, then, lies in the identities of Jehoiachin and Cyrus: their identities are wrapped up with each other via the figure of David, but they are also noticeably distinct. Jehoiachin, despite his exaltation in the Babylonian court, sits under the thumb of a foreign emperor, while Cyrus is the foreign emperor, the great king of Persia and king of kings.

52. Pace Braun, “Cyrus in Second Isaiah,” 155, who states that Chronicles (and Ezra) does not have the “bold theological interpretation” of Cyrus one finds in Isaiah. In this case he fails to recognize the significance of Cyrus replacing David in the context of the book of Chronicles, and thus the Davidization of Cyrus.

mold as Yahweh’s anointed and kingly son (cf. Ps 2). “Cyrus,” writes Joseph Blenkinsopp, “has taken the place of the Davidic royal house, at least for the time being.”54 As Yahweh’s anointed, the deity’s shepherd and servant and perhaps even his son, Cyrus is certainly something of an Israelite.

This should strike one as curious, for Cyrus is clearly not an “Israelite” in the typical sense of the term. He is not a descendent of Jacob, nor did Yahweh rescue any of his ancestors from Egyptian bondage and bring them to the promised land. Moreover, Cyrus seems an unlikely fit for the role of Israelite king, at least as it is envisioned in Deuteronomic law. The Deuteronomic king, recall, is one whose dynasty is meant to last long “in the midst of Israel” (בקרב ישראל, Deut 17:20). Cyrus is never remembered explicitly as an *Israelite* dynast in Israel: this is a definite tension in the discourse. Blenkinsopp therefore states, “We suspect not all of the prophet’s audience would have agreed with [this affirmation of Cyrus].”55

Indeed, Isa 45:9–12 seems to anticipate the discord:

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Woe to the one who contends with his maker,  
a pot among earthen pots.  
Does the clay say to his maker, “What are you doing”?  
or “Your work lacks handles”?  
Woe to one who says to a father, “What are you begetting?”  
or to a mother, “What are you bearing?”  
Thus says Yahweh,  
the holy one of Israel, and its maker:  
Concerning the things to come,  
you would question me about my children,  
about the work of my hands you would command me!?  
I made the earth,  
and humankind upon it I created.  
It was I; my hands stretched out the heavens,  
and all their host I commanded.

It seems these verses are meant to squelch any potential criticism, by shaming anyone who would argue with the deity, in order to “facilitate local acceptance of this foreign ruler.” Nonetheless, the tension with Deuteronomy’s king-law—part of Yahweh’s Torah mediated by Moses—stands.

On account of this tension, Anselm Hagedorn suggests that the non-foreigner injunction in Deut 17:15, in its postmonarchic context, was meant to counter Isaiah’s depiction of Cyrus as one of Yahweh’s specially chosen kings. Hagedorn makes an important observation here, but one that I would approach from a slightly different angle. Rather than seeing the king-law’s distaste for foreigners as a response to pro-Persian statements in Yehudite discourse, I suggest that the images of Cyrus, as part

56. Fried, “Cyrus the Messiah?” 390. Note also that the “I am” statements in 45:5–7 might be meant to ensure the supremacy of Yahweh as the sole deity (see esp. v. 7) despite the anointing of an ostensibly non-Yahwistic Persian king (cf. Antti Laato, The Servant of YHWH and Cyrus: A Reinterpretation of the Exilic Messianic Programme in Isaiah 40–55 [ConBOT 35; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1992], 184; Braun, “Cyrus in Second Isaiah,” 148). I am, however, hesitant to label the passages in Isa 40–55 as absolutely “monotheistic” (cf. Saul Olyan, “Is Isaiah 40–55 Really Monotheistic?” JANER 12 [2012]: 190–201). One must consider statements such as Isa 45:5 in light of texts like Isa 40:1–8, 25–26; 51:9–11, which take seriously the existence and even volition of other deities.

57. Anselm C. Hagedorn, Between Moses and Plato: Individual and Society in Deuteronomy and Ancient Greek Law (FRLANT 204; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 141.
of Yehud’s mnemonic system in the late Persian era, provided a minority report—“radical” in its formulation and implications—on what it meant, to Yehudites, to be an Israelite. In other words, instead of having the king-law provide a corrective to pro-Cyrus (and thus pro-foreigner) sentiments, these hopeful visions of Cyrus constructed an alternative narrative, a counterbalancing memory, of how one defined and demarcated the identity of Israelite political leadership in the postmonarchic era. Not all of Isaiah’s and Chronicles’ audience would have agreed with this affirmation of Cyrus, but some certainly did. To support Cyrus’s role as Yahweh’s anointed king and temple builder, literati would have sought continuities between Cyrus and Israelite kingship. They would have framed their remembering of Cyrus with memories of the great Israelite kings of old; Israeliite kingship would have functioned as a model of and for Cyrus, and Cyrus, in turn, would have functioned as a model of and for present understandings of Yehudite politics and society. There was no past king that represented Israel more than David; Cyrus was, therefore, remembered as a kind of Davidide, as an Israeliite king par excellence. From this symbolic perspective, I argue, memories of the “foreigner” Cyrus remained partly within the bounds of Deuteronomy’s king-law (at least as much as David and Solomon did). Concomitantly, memories of the Persian altered what it meant to be a “foreigner” with regard to the law. This is not the dominant position in the discourse, but it is a prominent statement nonetheless.

That said, I do not want to give the impression that memories of Cyrus somehow fulfilled the Deuteronomic law. Again, he is not the king Deuteronomy envisions: the discourse never portrays him as reading or meditating upon Torah, for example. But one can say the same about Israel’s own great kings: as mentioned above, David and especially Solomon have a hard time meeting the requirements of Deuteronomy. Cyrus, via David, carries the mark of “Israeliteness,” but he is nonetheless the “king

58. Blenkinsopp, David Remembered, 70.
59. As noted above, however, the book of Ezra does depict Persian kingship promulgating Torah.
60. In addition to Solomon’s issues with women, horses, and wealth, one can add his and David’s active involvement in the cult (e.g., 2 Sam 6:17; 1 Kgs 8:63–64), which is not compatible with Deuteronomy’s vision for kingship or the cult in general. Josiah, whose reforms scholars often want to link with the book of Deuteronomy, also seems to transgress the book’s bounds for cultic leadership (cf. 2 Kgs 23:20; see Knoppers, “Deuteronomist,” 336; Levinson, “Reconceptualization,” 525–26).
of Persia” (cf. 2 Chr 36:22–23). In some respects he remains an outsider, simply an agent of Yahweh’s purposes, like all other foreign kings. In the end, we must wrestle with what amounts to two discontinuous strands of thought: (1) the Torah-promulgating king of Deuteronomy, who has no real political power; and (2) the politically powerful Near Eastern king, embodied in David and Solomon (and Cyrus), whose divinely granted powers ensure the construction of Yahweh’s temple in Jerusalem. Despite the convergence between Cyrus and David, there is an undeniable divergence between Cyrus (and Davidic kingship) and the law of the king. The relationship between Cyrus and David likely stretched understandings of the king-law, but it did not eliminate the general discursive tension that existed between the king-law and Davidic kingship in general.

Also, one is still left with the problem of a dynasty (Deut 17:20). Historically speaking, we know that Cyrus’s own dynasty became a problem. Of course, the narratives of Samuel and Kings portray David’s dynasty as no less problematic. Dynasty is, not surprisingly, a recurring issue in Yehudite kingship-discourse. With the Davidization of Cyrus, however, dynasty is maintained: Cyrus steps into the Davidic line, at least temporarily preserving the “foreverness” of Davidic rule. But what about the qualification “in the midst of Israel”? In Deuteronomy, the phrase בקבר יושארא refers foremost to presence among the people of Israel, not necessarily presence in the land. As Yahweh’s anointed, as one functioning in the role of a Davidide, the readership could have easily understood Cyrus to be a symbolic member of the Israelite people—one “in their midst,” despite a lack of physical nearness to or presence in the land. Similarly, those in the diaspora were thought to be part of “Israel” despite their


62. As Knoppers argues, the important issue is not Davidic succession per se, but the ongoing significance of the concepts of Davidic kingship for the community (“David’s Relation to Moses,” 117–18). Cyrus preserves Davidic kingship and its ideals without preserving the actual blood line.

63. See Deut 11:6; 21:8; also cf. Exod 17:7; 33:5; Num 11:4; Josh 7:13; 1 Sam 4:3; etc. However, in a few instances the phrase may refer to either the people or the physical land (e.g., Josh 6:25). Of course, on the whole, the people and the land are practically inextricable, but at least here within Deuteronomy the phrase points toward the people.
distance from the land of Israel, and, in at least one strand of thought, literati looked forward to the day when all would return to the land (e.g., Isa 11:11–15). Like the Mesopotamians Noah and Abraham, then, Cyrus functions as an important symbol of “Israeliteness,” one who faithfully responds to Yahweh’s call to service, despite his not actually being an Israelite in terms of lineage. In this way he certainly shaped the literati’s understandings of empire and of kingship, as they are framed in the discourse.64

These tensions aside, the undeniable convergence in the figures of Cyrus and David must have impacted readings of the king-law in the late Persian period. There is no question that David was understood to be an Israelite, and there is no question that Cyrus was understood to be a type of Davidide. Cyrus’s “otherness,” writes Ehud Ben Zvi, “is consistently blurred.”65 This fuzzy vision of Cyrus’s identity, in turn, would have forced the literati to (re)consider the meaning of the prohibition against foreigners in the king-law, and would have pushed the limits of Israel’s (the people’s) sociocultural boundaries. The convergence between David and Cyrus likely provided one means for balancing out criticisms of empire, and for helping Yehud deal with the realities of its marginalized and subjugated place in an imperialized world. Israelite and Persian kingship were hybridized. The literati, in this way, (partly) appropriated the Great King of Persia as their own and, in turn, expanded the horizons of Israelite kingship-identity in their postmonarchic era. In certain cases, even a Persian emperor could function as a proper, Yahwistic king of Israel, with his Davidic persona satisfying and even revising the requirements of identity as foreseen in Deuteronomy’s king-law.66

64. While Persian kingship is glorified, Assyrian and Babylonian kingship is denigrated, especially in the prophetic books (with the occasional exception of Nebuchadnezzar, as noted above; see Stökl, “Nebuchadnezzar,” 262–67). Assyria and Babylon function, for the most part, as foils to Persia in the kingship-discourse, presenting a strongly negative take on imperialism and foreign kingship.


66. Notice, too, that Cyrus’s military power, his wealth and prestige, any hints of self-aggrandizement, etc., are conveniently forgotten in the Yehudite depictions of him (unlike the depictions of Assyrian and Babylonian kings). To be sure, he is credited with great power and even “goods/treasures” (Isa 45:3), but the literature makes it clear, especially in Isa 45, that these actually belong to Yahweh, and that these divine gifts are for the exclusive purpose of making known Israel and Yahweh himself.
The identity of Yehudite literati, as a group, was not monolithic and static, nor were the identities of Yehudite individuals. Negotiation of identity in Yehud, and its ongoing formations, was correlate to the narratives in Yehud’s emerging corpus of literature, its (hi)stories of past, present, and future. The identities generated by the reading of said literature were attached to certain strands of thought within the literature, certain preferences concerning issues of boundaries, definitions, categorization, classification. And all this, in turn, contributed to the (re)formations of Yehudite identity.

In the foregoing analysis I have called attention to (at least) three narrative formations of identity in Yehud’s social remembering, each of which concerns itself primarily with kingship. First, according to Deuteronomic law, Israel may be a people governed by kingship and dynasty, but any king must be exclusively Israelite, devoting himself solely to the Israelite deity Yahweh and Yahweh’s divine instruction. Second, in the aftermath of foreign conquest and destruction, Yahweh may legitimately choose a foreigner—even a non-Yahwist—to rule over Israel, to step into the void left by the failed and apostate Israelite monarchy (cf. Isa; Chr). One could feasibly stop there, seeing these two narrative constructions as antithetical and competing: two opposed opinions concerning the legitimacy of Israelite kingship in the past and its place in the future, with one simply countering the other or vice versa. A third, synthetic narrative emerges, however, when one recognizes that these narratives are two statements in a discourse that stretches across the demarcations within Yehud’s literary corpus and thus within Yehudite literate society. As Yahweh’s anointed shepherd and servant, Cyrus is a kind of Israelite, and not just any kind of Israelite: he is a kind of Davidide. The first two narratives are, thus, brought into conversation via the third, which, like the purported inscription on Cyrus’s tomb, seems to say: do not begrudge Cyrus his Davidic memorial, indeed.

This essay, though, admittedly invites more than it concludes. The issue of Cyrus, David, and Deuteronomy’s king-law is part of an extensive Yehudite discourse on kingship and political identity. The issue of who may be king of Israel (as imagined in the past and in the future) does not limit itself to options of Israelite or foreigner, Yahwist or not. It also introduces abstractions such as, for example, the “democratization” of kingship, that is, the Davidization of Israel as a whole (e.g., Isa 55:3–5)—the sort
of political conceptualization typically understood to be the sole property of Greek thought. Further complicating matters, in addition to who should be king, one encounters concomitant questions of how to be king. Consider, for example, the idea of a “kingdom of priests” in Exod 19:6, which has implications for understandings of democratization and for the interrelationship between kingship and cult. These questions are equally tricky, perhaps even more so, and they too find much discursive fuel in the king-law, representations of Davidic kingship, and the ancient Near Eastern conventions of power. These considerations of the past informed the literati’s visions of themselves and of Israel going forward. As part and parcel of Yehudite social remembering of kingship, Cyrus was a bridge connecting diverse sociopolitical landscapes in Israel’s recent and distant pasts: a conspicuous marker of division itself, a monumental construction calling attention to an impasse, but also a means of conjoining the disjunction, of eliminating the impasse altogether. In this way, in Yehud one individual might have looked back at the Persian king as a figure who marked the end of Israelite kingship and Davidic hope, while another might have seen him as its new beginning. And yet for another, might Cyrus have been both at once?

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YAHWEH’S ANOINTED


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