

Bishlam's Archival Search Report in Nehemiah's Archive: Multiple Introductions and Reverse Chronological Order as Clues to the Origin of the Aramaic Letters in Ezra 4–6

RICHARD C. STEINER
rsteiner@yu.edu
Yeshiva University, New York, NY 10033

4:7 ובימי ארתחששתא כתב בשלם מתרדת טבאל ושאר כנותו על-ארתחששתא
מלך פרס וכתב הנשתון כתוב ארמית ומתרגם ארמית: פ
8 רחום בעל-טעם ושמי ספרא כתבו אגרה חדה על-ירושלם לארתחששתא
מלכא כנמא:
9 אדון רחום בעל-טעם ושמי ספרא ושאר כנותהון דיניא ואפרסתכיא טרפליא
אפרסיא ארכוי בבליא שושנכיא דהיא (דהוא) עלמא:
10 ושאר אמיא די הגלי אסנפר רבא ויקירא והותב המו בקריה די שמרין ושאר
עבר-נהרה וכענת:
11 דנה פרשגן אגרתא די שלחו עלוהי על-ארתחששתא מלכא עבדיך אנש
עבר-נהרה וכענת:

^{4:7}And in the days of Artaxerxes, Bishlam (together with) Mithredath, Tabeel and the rest of his colleagues wrote to Artaxerxes, king of Persia; the letter was written in Aramaic and translated into Aramaic:

This article is dedicated to the librarians of Yeshiva University, who have worked tirelessly to assist me in preparing it. They are truly worthy heirs of the ancient *bibliophylakes* discussed below. I am very grateful, as well, to Sara Japhet and Bezalel Porten for their many incisive comments on earlier versions of this article. They are not responsible for the mistakes that remain. Finally, I would like to thank Paul-Alain Beaulieu, Willy Clarysse, Barry L. Eichler, Menachem Jacobowitz, Janet H. Johnson, Aaron J. Koller, and S. Z. Leiman for their generous help.

⁸Rehum the commissioner and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter about Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes as follows:

⁹Then Rehum the commissioner and Shimshai the scribe and the rest of their colleagues, the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the Apharsites, the Archevites, the Babylonians, the Susanchites, the Dehavites, the Elamites,¹

¹⁰and the other peoples whom the great and glorious Asenappar deported and settled in the cities of Samaria and the rest of Across-the-River—and now,

¹¹this is a copy of the letter which they sent him: To King Artaxerxes (from) your servants, the men of Across-the-River. And now . . .

The first Aramaic section in Ezra (4:8–6:18), consisting of four letters (letters to and from Artaxerxes I together with letters to and from Darius I) plus narrative, presents several literary problems. One is the order: the Artaxerxes I correspondence is presented before the Darius I correspondence, even though Darius I is the earlier king. This “incorrect” (reverse chronological) order stands in striking contrast to the “correct” (chronological) order in 6:14: “by the decree of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes.” What is the reason for this discrepancy?

Another problem is the lack of coherence at the beginning of the section. From ancient times to the present day, exegetes have struggled to understand how the first four Aramaic verses, Ezra 4:8–11, relate to Ezra 4:7 and to each other. Kurt Gallig called this “an old *crux interpretum*.”² Loring W. Batten threw up his hands in despair:

It would be difficult to find a more corrupt text than vv. 7–11. At first sight the case seems quite hopeless, for while there can be but a single letter, there are two sets of complainants, and there are three different introductions. The whole is so confused in MT. that we seem balked at every point.³

In this article, I shall argue that Ezra 4:7–11, with its “three different introductions,” preserves traces of four documentary strata—a quotation within a quotation within a quotation set within a Hebrew-Aramaic narrative framework. In other words, I hope to show that the appearance of multiple introductions is the telltale sign of a complex literary *tell*. Patient excavation of this *tell* (in reverse chronological order, of course!) will unearth two archives, one belonging to Nehemiah and the other belonging to Bishlam and his colleagues. Buried deep in these archives is a new solution to the aforementioned problems of Ezra 4:7–6:18, a solution that also makes good sense of two expressions labeled “senseless” by scholars: ארמית ומתרגם ארמית in 4:7 and אדין in 4:9.

¹The translation of 4:9b follows AV; see Appendix 1 below.

²Kurt Gallig, “Kronzeugen des Artaxerxes? Eine Interpretation von Esra 4,9 f.,” ZAW 63 (1951): 70.

³Loring W. Batten, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1913), 166.

I. AUTHENTICITY

Before beginning our tale of two archives, it is necessary to say a word about the authenticity of the four Aramaic letters in Ezra 4–6, in view of the claim of some scholars that they are Hellenistic fabrications.⁴ A simmering debate over this issue came to a boil in 1896, when Eduard Meyer argued in *Die Entstehung des Judentums* that the Aramaic letters in Ezra are copies of official documents.⁵ Though sharply criticized by Julius Wellhausen, Charles C. Torrey, and others, Meyer lived to see the publication of a Babylonian cuneiform tablet from year 20 of Darius (502 B.C.E.) containing a reference to *Tattannu piḥāt*⁶ *Ebir Nāri*, clearly identical to תתני פחת עבר נהרה, whose letter (Ezra 5:6–17) is from year 2 of Darius (520 B.C.E.).⁷

This tablet is far from the only subsequent discovery to support Meyer's case. Ten years after his book appeared, Imperial Aramaic documents were discovered at Elephantine. Meyer hailed this discovery in a new book, asserting that the striking agreement in style and wording between the Elephantine documents and the Aramaic documents in Ezra made any further doubt about the authenticity of the latter impossible.⁸

Meyer could have added that the Elephantine papyri shed new light on some of the Aramaic phrases in Ezra 4–6 that he had discussed. Take, for example, the phrase ששבצר שמה, “a man named Sheshbazzar,” in Tattenai's letter (5:14). This phrase, whose literal meaning is “Sheshbazzar his name,” exhibits a distinctive idiomatic construction that “appears at the first mention of a proper name which is supposed to be unknown to the reader.”⁹ In other words, it has what we may call

⁴ See also Appendix 2 below. For a similar debate concerning the Aramaic letter in Ezra 7, see Richard C. Steiner, “The *Mbqr* at Qumran, the *Episkopos* in the Athenian Empire, and the Meaning of *lbqr* in Ezra 7:14: On the Relation of Ezra's Mission to the Persian Legal Project,” *JBL* 120 (2001): 623–46; and Bezael Porten, “Elephantine and the Bible,” in *Semitic Papyrology in Context* (ed. L. H. Schiffman; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 59–62.

⁵ Eduard Meyer, *Die Entstehung des Judentums: Eine historische Untersuchung* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1896), 8–71; cf. Franz Rosenthal, *Die aramaistische Forschung seit Th. Nöldeke's Veröffentlichungen* (Leiden: Brill, 1939), 63–71.

⁶ Better: *paḥat*.

⁷ The text was published already in 1907, but its significance was not pointed out until 1923, seven years before Meyer's death. See Walther Schwenzner, “Gobryas,” *Klio* 18 (1923): 246; A. Ungnad, “Keilinschriftliche Beiträge zum Buch Esra und Ester,” *ZAW* 58 (1940): 240–41; A. T. Olmstead, “Tattenai, Governor of ‘Across the River,’” *JNES* 3 (1944): 46; Anson F. Rainey, תתני, in *Encyclopedia Miqra'it* 8:962–64; Matthew W. Stolper, “The Governor of Babylon and Across-the-River in 486 B.C.,” *JNES* 48 (1989): 289, 292.

⁸ Eduard Meyer, *Der Papyrusfund von Elephantine* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1912), 4; cf. Porten, “Elephantine and the Bible,” 51.

⁹ E. Y. Kutscher, “New Aramaic Texts,” *JAOS* 74 (1954): 241, reprinted in idem, *Hebrew and Aramaic Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1977), 45. The phrase “to the reader” deserves to be emphasized; the knowledge of the writer or speaker is irrelevant. One can use שמה after the name of one's own

a “de-definitizing” function, making proper names (which are inherently definite) indefinite or quasi-indefinite.

Meyer compared ששבצר שמה to Old Persian *Vidarna nâma* and Akkadian *Umidarna šumšu*, both appearing in Darius’s trilingual Behistun inscription. He conjectured that this construction was used in Imperial Aramaic as well and that it was therefore evidence for the antiquity and authenticity of the letter(s). This bold conjecture was confirmed through the publication of an Aramaic version of the Behistun inscription discovered at Elephantine. That text and others from Elephantine contained numerous examples of the ששבצר שמה construction.¹⁰ However, that is not the end of the story.

With time, it became clear to Aramaists that the construction had a short life span within Aramaic. In 1954, in discussing the possibility of a Persian origin for this construction, E. Y. Kutscher noted that “in Aramaic it is not known in the preceding periods . . . nor in the following ones.”¹¹ In 1995, M. L. Folmer wrote that “this use of *šmh* is not known from other Aramaic dialects, be it earlier or later. . . .”¹² (The last words of the sentence are “with the exception of the inscriptions of King Asoka”; however, the alleged exceptions are illusory, because they do not exhibit the same syntactic construction as ששבצר שמה.)¹³ During the past ten years,

child or father, and even after one’s own name; see M. L. Folmer, *The Aramaic Language in the Achaemenid Period: A Study in Linguistic Variation* (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 676–77 (child: יהשמע ברי, 678 (father: אבי שמה, פמון שמה), 679 (self: . . . שמה [ריה] גמ[ריה]), and add Aḥiqar col. 2, line 18 (child: ברי שמה, נדן שמה, ברי). For the view that indefiniteness in English implies unfamiliarity to the hearer rather than the speaker, see Christopher Lyons, *Definiteness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 254. See also Jae-Il Yeom, *A Presuppositional Analysis of Specific Indefinites* (New York: Garland, 1998), 101: “When [the speaker] thinks that the audience does not know who the name refers to, he must use an indefinite. . . .” Kutscher’s use of the word “supposed” is also accurate; the use of the construction depends on what the writer/speaker believes about the addressee’s knowledge. Would the average reader in fifth-century Egypt have heard of Esarhaddon, who ruled Assyria for a decade more than two centuries earlier? In Aḥiqar col. 1, line 5, the word שמה did not originally appear after Esarhaddon’s name, but it was added later between the lines. (Ada Yardeni informs me that it was added by the scribe who wrote the rest of the text.) Is this correction a scribal emendation, indicating that Esarhaddon was no longer a household name in that time and place?

¹⁰ Eduard Sachau, *Aramäische Papyrus und Ostraka aus einer jüdischen Militär-Kolonie zu Elephantine* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1911), 31; 148 and 151 (Aḥiqar); 187 and 191 (Behistun). Batten (*Ezra and Nehemiah*, 140), unaware of these parallels, thought that the phrase was the product of dittography: “שמה די פחה שמה can scarcely be right. . . . שמה may be an accidental anticipation of שמה . . . and its omission seems necessary.”

¹¹ Kutscher, “New Aramaic Texts,” 241 = *Hebrew and Aramaic Studies*, 45.

¹² Folmer, *Aramaic Language*, 683. See also *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions* (ed. J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 1157; Klaus Beyer, *Die aramäischen Texte vom Toten Meer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984–94), 1:712.

¹³ Hans Bauer and Pontus Leander (*Grammatik des Biblisch-Aramäischen* [Halle: M. Niemeyer, 1927], 358) analyze ששבצר שמה as a substantivized asyndetic relative clause, that is, as roughly equivalent to גבר די ששבצר שמה, “a man whose name was Sheshbazzar.” This fuller form has near-parallels in Zech 6:12; Dan 2:26; etc. Those parallels make it unlikely that ששבצר שמה exhibits

another example of the construction has turned up, in an Aramaic ostrakon from Idumea. It too is from the Achaemenid period (first half of the fifth century B.C.E.).¹⁴ In short, it is still the case that the construction is unattested after the Achaemenid period.¹⁵ With more than a century of hindsight, we may say that Meyer's argument from the phrase *ששבצר שמה* has been confirmed beyond his wildest expectations.

Even so, it is possible to take Meyer's argument a step further. In Tattenai's letter, *ששבצר שמה* (5:14) is followed by *ששבצר דך*, "that Sheshbazzar" (5:16). Meyer pointed out that the anaphoric attributive use of *דך* ("the aforementioned") is unusually frequent in these letters, and he noted that this stylistic feature has a parallel in the Old Persian inscriptions.¹⁶ However, he did not point out the interesting relationship between *ששבצר שמה* and *ששבצר דך*. Here we have "de-definitizing *שמה*" followed by a "re-definitizing *דך*." Even this detail is paralleled at Elephantine. For example, in TAD B3.9 Kraeling 8, a lad named Jedaniah b. Taḥwa is adopted by Uriah b. Mahseiah.¹⁷ In line 3, Jedaniah is introduced as *בר תחוא, דיניה שמה*; subsequently, in lines 7 and 8, he is referred to as *דיניה זך*. This parallel adds a new dimension to Meyer's argument.

Another phrase discussed by Meyer that subsequently turned up at Elephantine is *בעל טעם* (Ezra 4:8–9). Meyer observed that this administrative term was sometimes transliterated by the Greek translators (e.g., 1 Esdr 2:12 *Παουμος καὶ Βεελτέμος*, as if the Aramaic text had *רְחוּם וּבַעֲלֵטֵעַם*), indicating that it was no longer understood by them.¹⁸ Here again, a century of research makes it possible to go further. We now have evidence that this term was in use in the Achaemenid period, but no evidence that it was used later. It is attested in an Elephantine papyrus from 411 B.C.E. (TAD A6.2 Cowley 26 line 23) and (as *bēl ḫēmu*) in two

apposition, as more recent scholars believe; see Stanislav Segert, *Altaramäische Grammatik* (Leipzig: Verlag Enzyklopädie, 1986), 413; Takamitsu Muraoka and Bezalel Porten, *A Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic* (Leiden: Brill, 1998) 252–53. Either way, it should be obvious that *ששבצר שמה*, governed by the preposition *ל-*, is a noun phrase—not a clause. However, if *זנה תורא אהותי שמה* means "this crag (or: mountain)—A:hwati: (is) its name" (with *תורא* for *טורא*), as Folmer (*Aramaic Language*, 684 n. 421) believes, then *אהותי שמה* is not a noun phrase but a clause. Similarly, *זנה תמה תדמר*, *שמה* probably means "that (place) there—Tadmor is its name." Folmer has muddied the waters by defining the construction too loosely: "proper nouns . . . are sometimes followed by the word *šmh*" (*Aramaic Language*, 674).

¹⁴ Israel Eph'al and Joseph Naveh, *Aramaic Ostraca of the Fourth Century BC from Idumaea* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1996), 92 no. 201.

¹⁵ For a possible attestation *before* the Achaemenid period, in an unpublished tablet of the seventh century B.C.E., see É. Lipiński, "Araméen d'Empire," in *Le Langage dans l'Antiquité* (ed. P. Swiggers and A. Wouters; Louvain: Peeters, 1990), 104.

¹⁶ Meyer, *Entstehung*, 29; cf. Porten, "Elephantine and the Bible," 58–59.

¹⁷ Bezalel Porten and Ada Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1986–99) (henceforth: TAD), B3.9 Kraeling 8.

¹⁸ Meyer, *Entstehung*, 33–34. 1 Esdras 2:13 has *Παουμος ὁ τὰ προσπίπτοντα*, and 2:19 has *Παούμω τῷ γράφοντι τὰ προσπίπτοντα καὶ Βεελτεέμω*.

Babylonian tablets, one from the time of Cyrus or Cambyses and the other from the time of Darius (486 B.C.E.).¹⁹ The absence of attestations after the fifth century can now be added to Meyer's observation as evidence for the authenticity of Rehum's letter.

In the 1930s, two new defenses of the authenticity of the letters were presented by Hans Heinrich Schaeder and Roland de Vaux.²⁰ After a thorough study of the Achaemenid *Sitz im Leben* of the term מַפְרָשׁ, "in translation," Schaeder concluded that the occurrence of that term in Artaxerxes' letter (4:18) dispels all doubt about the authenticity of that letter, thereby establishing the authenticity of the letter to which it replies (the letter of Rehum and Shimshai), as well.²¹ Some details of Schaeder's treatment of מַפְרָשׁ have been challenged, but, in general, it has stood the test of time.²²

De Vaux took up the arguments of the skeptics one by one, for example: "It is unlikely that the public treasury would have contributed to the restoration of the Temple (Ezr 6:4 and 8–9)." This is a claim that can be found in recent works as well: "Most suspect is the statement that the expenses of building are to come from imperial funds (6:8–10)."²³ De Vaux responded by pointing to the temple restoration projects of Cyrus in Babylonia and Darius in Egypt.²⁴ Darius's patronage of Egyptian religion is even better known today:

The Great King's protection of Egyptian worship and its priesthood was . . . expressed in the building of a grandiose Temple to Amon-Ra in the Oasis of El-Khārga. Proof of Darius' building activity in Egypt is given by the inscriptions in the caves at Wādī Hammāmāt; and blocks bearing his name have been found at El-Kāb in Upper Egypt and at Busiris in the Delta. A great number of stelae from the Serapeum can be dated to between the third and fourteenth year of Darius. A stela from Fayyūm is dedicated to Darius as the god Horus; and we know from the statue of Udjahorresne that Darius gave orders for the restoration of the "house of life" at Saïs.²⁵

¹⁹ Stolper, "Governor," 298–303; M. Heltzer, "A Recently Published Babylonian Tablet and the Province of Judah after 516 B.C.E.," *Transeuphratène* 5 (1992): 57–61; Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 447.

²⁰ Hans Heinrich Schaeder, *Iranische Beiträge* I (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1930); Roland de Vaux, "The Decrees of Cyrus and Darius on the Rebuilding of the Temple," in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (trans. Damian McHugh; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 63–96; originally published in *RB* 46 (1937): 29–57.

²¹ Schaeder, *Iranische Beiträge*, 14.

²² See Jonas C. Greenfield and Joseph Naveh, "Hebrew and Aramaic in the Persian Period," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984–), 1:116, and the literature cited there in n. 3.

²³ Lester L. Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (Routledge: London, 1998), 131–32.

²⁴ De Vaux, *Bible*, 92–93.

²⁵ E. Bresciani, "The Persian Occupation of Egypt," in *The Cambridge History of Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968–91), 2:508. See also I. Eph'al, "Syria-Palestine under Achaemenid Rule," *CAH* 4:151.

Another important defense of the letters was published in 1978–79 by Bezalel Porten.²⁶ Porten showed that there are literally dozens of stylistic parallels between the Imperial Aramaic documents from Egypt and the Aramaic letters in Ezra. Some of these are so striking that had the papyri been discovered today they would surely have been branded forgeries! I shall mention only a few examples, drawn from letters in the archive of Jedaniah, head of the Jewish community at Elephantine. In *TAD* A4.7 Cowley 30 lines 28–29, we find the phrase שלחן הודען על זנה, “because of this we have sent (and) informed (you)”; it is virtually identical to the phrase על דנה שלחנא והודענא in the letter of Rehum and Shimshai (Ezra 4:14).²⁷ In *TAD* A4.9 Cowley 32 lines 3–5, we have מן קדמן בנה הוה ביב בירתא בנה הוה מן קדמן, “the altar-house . . . which in Elephantine the fortress was standing [lit., built] formerly, before (the time of) Cambyses”; it closely resembles the phrase בית מדבחא . . . זי ביב בירתא בנה הוה מן קדמן, “the house which was standing [lit., built] formerly, for many years” (or: “was standing many years ago”) in Tattenai’s letter (Ezra 5:11). Later in the same two letters, we have another pair of parallel phrases: למבניה באתרה, “to rebuild it in its place” (*TAD* A4.9 line 8), and על אתרה יתבנא, “shall be rebuilt on its place” (Ezra 5:15).²⁸

Finally, a general consideration. The Artaxerxes correspondence is highly unfavorable to the Jews. The letter of Rehum and Shimshai characterizes Jerusalem as a “rebellious and wicked city” (Ezra 4:12) which is “harmful to kings” and in which “sedition has been rife . . . from early times” (4:15). Artaxerxes replies that, from a search of the archives, “it has been found that this city has from earliest times risen against kings and that rebellion and sedition have been rife in it” (4:19). The claim that these letters are Jewish fabrications makes little sense. Why would Jews invent letters so prejudicial to their cause?

II. ARCHIVES

If the Aramaic letters in Ezra are copies of official documents, it is reasonable to assume that they derive from government archives, and that is indeed what Meyer assumed.²⁹ Today we know that there were royal and satrapal archives scattered throughout the Persian Empire.³⁰

²⁶ Bezalel Porten, “The Documents in the Book of Ezra and Ezra’s Mission” (in Hebrew), *Shnaton* 3 (1978–79): 174–96; see also idem, “Elephantine and the Bible,” 58–59.

²⁷ Porten, “Documents,” 178.

²⁸ Only this second parallel (or, rather, a similar one) is noted by Porten (“Documents,” 186). It is discussed by Baruch Halpern (“A Historiographic Commentary on Ezra 1–6: Achronological Narrative and Dual Chronology in Israelite Historiography,” in *The Hebrew Bible and Its Interpretations* [ed. W. H. Propp et al.; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990], 88).

²⁹ Meyer, *Entstehung*, 26. So too A. van Selms, *Ezra en Nehemia* (Groningen: Wolters, 1935), 74.

³⁰ Deniz Kaptan, *The Daskyleion Bullae: Seal Images from the Western Achaemenid Empire* (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2002), 17–23; Olof Pedersén, *Archives and Libraries*

The book of Ezra itself, in the first Aramaic section, mentions chancery officials, archives, and archival records. Rehum's title, בעל טעם (Ezra 4:8–9), is a chancery term.³¹ The biblical author-historian's introduction to Darius's letter refers explicitly to a בית ספריא, "house of documents,"³² at Babylon (Ezra 6:1) and hints at the existence of another archive at Ecbatana (6:2).

In 2 Esdr 6:1, בית ספריא is rendered by the term βιβλιοθήκη. The use of this term in Greco-Roman Egypt is discussed by Ernst Posner:

A *biblion*, it should be remembered, signifies a roll of papyrus regardless of the content of the writing that appears on it; hence a *bibliothékē*³³ is a container for papyrus rolls and, in a wider sense, an institution or agency that preserves such rolls, whether of literary or business character. Thus a *bibliothékē* may be a repository for books, that is, a library, or a repository for records. In our context it is the latter: a record office or archival agency.³⁴

One type of βιβλιοθήκη has special relevance to our topic:

A second *bibliothékē*, the *bibliothékē dēmosia* ("public registry office"), kept copies of all public documents, which were provided to it by the *stratēgos* and the royal scribe, the main officials of the nome. These were of many kinds: diaries of officials, official correspondence, census declarations and lists of taxpayers, tax returns, petitions, etc. Both officials and private persons could consult the archive and receive abstracts from it.³⁵

2 Esdras 6:1 is not the only place in the Septuagint where the term βιβλιοθήκη appears. In the Greek version of Esth 2:23, we find it used of the archive where a

in the Ancient Near East 1500–300 B.C. (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 1998), 213–23, and passim; Briant, *From Cyrus*, 6, 66, 422–24, and passim. The entries for "archive, royal" and "archive, satrapal" in Briant's index (p. 1180) contain dozens of references. See also André Lemaire, "Writing and Writing Materials," *ABD* 6:1004–5.

³¹ See the references in n. 19 above.

³² Cf. Egyptian *pr-mḏjt*, "house of book-rolls." For differing views on whether the Egyptian term was used also of archives, libraries, or both, see Günter Burkard, "Bibliotheken im alten Ägypten," *Bibliothek* 4 (1980): 85–87; Vilmos Wessetzky, "Bibliothek," *LÄ* 1:783; and J. A. Black and W. J. Tait, "Archives and Libraries in the Ancient Near East," *CANE* 4:2198. For similar terms in Sumerian and Akkadian, see Mogens Weitemeyer, *Babylonske og assyriske arkiver og biblioteker* (Copenhagen: Branner og Korch, 1955), 71; idem, "Archive and Library Technique in Ancient Mesopotamia," *Libri* 6 (1956): 220; and M. A. Dandamayev, "The Neo-Babylonian Archives," in *Cuneiform Archives and Libraries* (ed. K. R. Veenhof; Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut, 1986), 276.

³³ From this term, we get Mishnaic Hebrew מִשְׁכַּת הַסֵּפֶר (*m. Šabb.* 16:1, so vocalized in reliable manuscripts), "scroll container"—not to mention English *discotheque*!

³⁴ Ernst Posner, *Archives in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 141.

³⁵ Willy Clarysse, "Tomoi Synkollēsimoī," in *Ancient Archives and Archival Traditions: Concepts of Record-Keeping in the Ancient World* (ed. M. Brosius; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 347.

memorandum concerning Mardochoaios was stored. In the second Hanukkah letter at the beginning of 2 Maccabees (2:13), we find mention of a βιβλιοθήκη established by Nehemiah.³⁶ There is certainly no reason to doubt that Nehemiah had an archive/library when he was governor of Judah; bullae from the archive of an earlier Persian governor of Judah named Elnathan have been published by N. Avigad.³⁷ Nehemiah's βιβλιοθήκη contained not only "the books about the kings and the prophets and the books/writings of David" (τὰ περὶ τῶν βασιλέων βιβλία καὶ προφητῶν καὶ τὰ τοῦ Δαυιδ) but also "letters of kings³⁸ concerning votive offerings" (ἐπιστολὰς βασιλέων περὶ ἀναθεμάτων).³⁹ This last phrase is generally understood to be a reference to two royal letters, Darius's letter to Tattenai and Artaxerxes' letter to Ezra, both of which deal with votive offerings (Ezra 6:9 and 7:22).⁴⁰ Clearly Meyer was not the first one to associate these letters with the archive of a Persian official in Jerusalem!

As the source of his knowledge about Nehemiah's βιβλιοθήκη, the author of the second Hanukkah letter⁴¹ cites "records and memoirs of the time of Nehemiah" (2 Macc 2:13), but he does not mention that they themselves were housed in the βιβλιοθήκη. This is a striking omission because at least some of those records and memoirs can be found today in Chronicles and, presumably, Ezra-Nehemiah.⁴² It makes the mention of "letters of kings concerning votive offerings" alongside of "the books about the kings and the prophets and the books/writings of David" all the more remarkable. One gets the impression that the letters were considered to have great legal and/or historical value and perhaps that they were (or were thought to have been) preserved for some time separate from the "memoirs of the time of Nehemiah." We shall return to this point later.

³⁶ See Jean Louis Ska, "Persian Imperial Authorization: Some Question Marks," in *Persia and Torah* (ed. J. W. Watts; SBLSymS 17; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 172–73.

³⁷ Nahman Avigad, *Bullae and Seals from a Post-Exilic Judean Archive* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1976), 32–35. Avigad (pp. 6–7) assumes that Elnathan's title, אֶלְנָתָן, is equivalent to הַגָּבֵר, "governor." If אֶלְנָתָן refers to a lower official, as some have suggested, then the fact that Elnathan had an archive makes it even more likely that Nehemiah had one too.

³⁸ Note indefinite "kings" (Persian) contrasting with "the kings" (Jewish) in the previous phrase.

³⁹ For a sample of views on the meaning and historicity of the passage, see Sid Z. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence* (New Haven: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1976), 28–29; Lemaire, "Writing," 1005; Menahem Haran, "Archives, Libraries, and the Order of the Biblical Books," *JANES* 22 (1993): 59; Philip R. Davies, *Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 87.

⁴⁰ Jonathan A. Goldstein, *II Maccabees: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 41A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 156, 186–87.

⁴¹ The identity of the author is controversial. For a claim that it was Judas Maccabeus himself, see Thomas Fischer, "Maccabees, Books of; First and Second Maccabees," *ABD* 4:444a.

⁴² The "records and memoirs of the time of Nehemiah" are said to contain an account of Solomon's eight-day celebration "in honor of the dedication and completion of the Temple" (see 1 Chr 7:9) and of fire descending from heaven to consume Solomon's sacrifice (see 1 Chr 7:1).

III. ARCHIVAL SEARCHES AND SEARCH REPORTS

Governments preserve documents in archives in order to be able to consult them at a later date. Thus, one of the main services provided by government archivists is reference service.⁴³ They search the archives at the request of government officials, and they report their findings to those officials. Archival searches are well documented in fifth-century Athens:

In addition to making copies, secretaries also consulted and conducted searches through their own records and those of their predecessors for a variety of reasons. . . . The frequency with which secretaries conducted such searches is difficult to gauge, but the attested cases need not be taken as isolated events; searching for, copying, and erasing uninscribed texts may have occupied much of a secretary's time.⁴⁴

Archival searches are known also from ancient Near Eastern texts. (1) In two instances mentioned in the Mari letters (eighteenth century B.C.E.), the king sends an emissary to retrieve specific baskets of tablets from a sealed storeroom.⁴⁵ (2) In the Egyptian inscription of Mes (thirteenth century B.C.E.), one of the litigants describes an earlier lawsuit in which the judge was asked to bring registers from two archives:

Then Nubnofret said to the Vizier: "Let there be brought to me the [two registers from the Treasury and likewise from the Department of the Granary(?). And the Vizier] said to her: "Very good is that which thou sayest." Then they brought us(?) downstream to Per-Ramessu. And they entered into the Treasury of Pharaoh, and likewise into the Department of the Granary of Pharaoh, and they brought the two registers before the Vizier in the Great Qenbet.⁴⁶

(3) In the Egyptian *Report of Wenamun* (eleventh century B.C.E.), Wenamun tells the prince of Byblos, "What your father did, what the father of your father did, you too will do it."⁴⁷ The prince of Byblos responds by having the "day-books of his ancestors" (cf. the "record-book[s] of your ancestors" in Ezra 4:15) brought and read aloud before Wenamun. (4) In a letter from the Seleucid king Antiochus I to his *stratēgos*, he orders him to make an inquiry that was "almost certainly conducted

⁴³ Posner, *Archives*, 84–85, 113, 141, 146, 176, 197.

⁴⁴ James P. Sickinger, *Public Records and Archives in Classical Athens* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 80.

⁴⁵ J. M. Sasson, "Some Comments on Archive Keeping at Mari," *Iraq* 34 (1972): 55–67; Black and Tait, "Archives," 2198.

⁴⁶ Alan H. Gardiner, *The Inscription of Mes: A Contribution to the Study of Egyptian Judicial Procedure* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1905), 8–9. I have refrained from modernizing Gardiner's transcriptions.

⁴⁷ Miriam Lichtheim, "The Report of Wenamun," *COS* 1:91; cf. *ANET*, 27; and Black and Tait, "Archives," 2203.

in the royal archives of Sardis (*basilikai graphai . . .*), comparable to the archives known in Achaemenid Babylonia. . . .⁴⁸

The archival search is a leitmotif of the Aramaic letters preserved in Ezra 4–6. We find references to it in 4:15 (יבקר בספר דכרניא די אבהתך), 4:19 (ובקרו) (והשכחו), 5:16 (יתבקר בבית גנזיא די מלכא), and 6:1 (ובקרו בבית ספריא)—one in each letter. In 4:15, officials in the time of Artaxerxes appear to be calling for a search of records going back to the time of Nebuchadnezzar.⁴⁹ Similar archival searches were requested during the reign of Cambyses by a chief of temple slaves in Uruk in an attempt to prove the inadequacy of the temple administration's current quota of supplies for his workers. In one cuneiform letter, he writes: "Consult the writing boards of Nebuchadnezzar, Neriglissar, and Nabonidus."⁵⁰

It appears that the Achaemenids viewed archival records as being of critical importance for good governance and consulted them on a regular basis (see Esth 6:1–2). Contemporary documents show that even minor decisions could require a review of past correspondence. A letter from Prince Arsames in 411 B.C.E. authorizing the repair of a boat at Elephantine (*TAD A6.2* Cowley 26) begins with "detailed repetition of previous communication between all parties on the subject."⁵¹ James M. Lindenberger writes: "The chancery scribes' habit of giving an epitome of earlier correspondence allows us to see in this letter the operation of the Achaemenid bureaucracy at its most convoluted. Four levels of previous administrative action are summarized before getting down to the business at hand."⁵² Pierre Briant's description of the Achaemenid bureaucracy as a "paper-shuffling" system⁵³ seems quite apt.

In such a bureaucracy, informal oral reports were probably discouraged. Indeed, the distances involved often made oral reporting impossible. When a Persian king ordered a search of several archives in his far-flung empire, the only practical way of conveying the results was through a written report, delivered by the storied Persian postal system. This is especially true if he ordered the archivists to search for all records pertaining to a certain topic. The records that turned up would have been copied over onto a new roll and forwarded to him.

⁴⁸ Briant, *From Cyrus*, 414.

⁴⁹ H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (WBC 16; Waco: Word Books, 1985), 63; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 114.

⁵⁰ Grant Frame, "Nabonidus, Nabû-šarra-ušur, and the Eanna Temple," *ZA* 81 (1991): 64; Matthew W. Stolper, "No-one Has Exact Information Except for You': Communication Between Babylon and Uruk in the First Achaemenid Reigns," *Achaemenid History* 13 (2003): 277, 284–85. I am indebted to Paul-Alain Beaulieu for calling this passage to my attention and for providing the latter reference.

⁵¹ John David Whitehead, "Early Aramaic Epistolography: The Arsames Correspondence" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1974), 123.

⁵² James M. Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters* (2nd ed.; SBLWAW 14; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 84.

⁵³ Briant, *From Cyrus*, 8 and 424.

IV. ARCHIVAL HEADINGS

In a well-run archive, records will have some sort of heading (or docket or endorsement) to make searches more efficient and to preserve information not found in the record itself. A heading is especially necessary for an archival record that is copied onto a new roll with other records.

In Egypt, the copying of records onto rolls is attested already in the temple archive from Kahun (nineteenth century B.C.E.).⁵⁴ For the Achaemenid period, we have a number of papyri from Elephantine that appear to be ledgers containing copies of individual records.⁵⁵ The practice continued down to the Roman period, when “official correspondence was usually copied out on a new roll.”⁵⁶

In the Bible, the Aramaic term ספר דכרניא, “book of records” (Ezra 4:15), and its Hebrew counterpart, ספר הזכרונות (Esth 6:1),⁵⁷ may indicate that each book or scroll contained many records.⁵⁸ The scroll found at Ecbatana containing a דכרונה from year 1 of Cyrus (Ezra 6:2–3) is generally believed to be just such a register roll.⁵⁹

When a record is copied onto a new roll with other records, its heading becomes a subheading. In *TAD* C3.13 Cowley 61–62 lines 10–12, after a *vacat*, we find: ... [מ]אני אח[...]. זי יהבת [ליד] מנחם בר עזריה [...] בירח אפף שנת [...] זכרן] יהו[ש] Menahem son of Azariah [...] in the month of Epiph, year [x of Dar]iu[s].” *TAD* C3.28 Cowley 81 is an “account of sales, income, and inventory” arranged in columns. At the top of column 7, we read: חשבן עבורא זי כתבת [ו]נתנת לאבהי

⁵⁴ Wolfgang Helck, “Archive,” *LÄ* 1:422–23.

⁵⁵ See below. Cf. Alan Millard, “Aramaic Documents of the Assyrian and Achaemenid Periods,” in *Ancient Archives and Archival Traditions*, ed. Brosius, 236: “It is easy to imagine a clerk collecting the ostraca in a basket at the end of a day or a week and transcribing the entries into a papyrus ledger, like those from Elephantine.”

⁵⁶ Clarysse, “*Tomoi*,” 355. Less commonly, the original documents were pasted together to form a *tomos synkollēsimos* (ibid.). See Harold Idris Bell, “The Custody of Records in Roman Egypt,” *Indian Archives* 4 (1950): 119. For the Ptolemaic periods, see Clarysse, “*Tomoi*,” 356.

⁵⁷ The full phrase is ספר הזכרונות דברי הימים, in which the old Hebrew term דברי הימים stands in apposition to the new term הזכרונות, translated from דכרניא.

⁵⁸ Contrast ספר זכרון (Mal 3:16), presumably referring to a document containing a single memorandum, such as *TAD* A4.9 Cowley 32, discussed below. However, Charles C. Torrey (*Ezra Studies* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1910], 188), followed by Bauer and Leander (*Grammatik*, 310) and Williamson (*Ezra*, 56), takes ספר דכרניא as a plural, that is, equivalent to ספרי דכרניא, “the books of records.” According to him, it is “virtually a compound word” and therefore takes the plural ending on the *nomen rectum* instead of the *nomen regens*.

⁵⁹ See A. T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 140; Posner, *Archives*, 126; Jonas C. Greenfield, “Aspects of Archives in the Achaemenid Period,” in *Cuneiform Archives and Libraries*, ed. Veenhof, 290; Haran, “Archives,” 53 n. 7; Millard, “Aramaic Documents,” 238.

chancery notation (*Kanzleivermerk*) borne by the letter already in the Jerusalem archive.⁶³ He conjectures that the letter of Rehum and Shimshai originally bore a similar chancery notation, something like ... *פרשגן אגרתא/נשתונא די שלח רחום* ... על ארתחשסת מלכא but that its parts became detached and dislocated, leaving the passage in disarray.⁶⁴

Good parallels for this type of archival heading have been found in Egypt. A Middle Kingdom tax assessor's day-book has rubrics such as "copy of the document brought to him as a dispatch from the fortress of Elephantine" and "copy of the writing sent to [...]."⁶⁵ A day-book of the King's House of Sobekhotpe III contains a rubric that begins "copy of the document."⁶⁶ The inscription of Mes has a heading that begins with a date followed by "copy of the examination which . . ."⁶⁷ A Greek report from Tebtunis (115 C.E.) has four headings that begin with the words Ἀντίγραφον ἐπιστολῆς, "copy of letter."⁶⁸

Also relevant here is the word *דכרונה*, "memorandum," at the end of Ezra 6:2.⁶⁹ It is usually understood as the heading of the document that follows, copied from the royal archive at Ecbatana. So too at Elephantine, one papyrus of the Jehoniah archive (*TAD* A4.9 Cowley 32) begins with the heading *זכרון זי בגוהי ודליה אמרו לי*, "memorandum of what Bagohi and Delaiah said to me." We shall return to these documents below.

Meyer's archive theory has been almost completely ignored in recent scholarship. It is telling that, even though H. G. M. Williamson views the letter of Rehum and Shimshai as deriving from an "unedited collection of official documents,"⁷⁰ he does not mention the possibility that Ezra 4:9–10 is based on an archival heading. Instead he writes:

it is known from numerous contemporary examples that Aramaic letters could include subscripts, summaries of contents and addresses, all separate from the main text of the letter. It seems probable that our author may have used this material too in his compilation (e.g., in vv 9–10). . . .⁷¹

⁶³ Meyer, *Entstehung*, 22, 26.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 26–28.

⁶⁵ Donald B. Redford, *Pharaonic King-lists, Annals and Day-books* (Mississauga, ON: Benben, 1986), 104–6.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁶⁷ See below.

⁶⁸ See below.

⁶⁹ For a discussion of the term, see Willy Schottroff, *'Gedenken' im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament: Die Wurzel zâkar im semitischen Sprachkreis* (WMANT 15; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1964), 300–302 and passim.

⁷⁰ Williamson, *Ezra*, 59.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* The idea was proposed two years earlier in Bezalel Porten, "The Address Formulae in Aramaic Letters: A New Collation of Cowley 17," *RB* 90 (1983): 400: "We thus wish to suggest that the apparent interpolation that is Ezra 4:9–10 is in fact based upon the expansive external address of the letter whereas 4:11b preserves the essence of the conventional terse internal address."

The only recent article to mention Meyer's archive theory is by Porten. Porten cites Meyer's view that the headings of the letters in Ezra come from chancery notations, but he gives the idea short shrift, since the notations on the Elephantine papyri do not contain words like פִּרְשָׁן, "copy," and גִּשְׁתָּן, "letter."⁷² Accordingly, Porten prefers to seek the origin of Ezra 4:9–10 in an external address.⁷³

I submit that Porten's view can and should be reconciled with Meyer's. If 4:9–10 originates in an external address, it is not because the biblical author copied it directly from the original letter (which he probably never saw), but because an archivist drew on it in preparing the archival heading for the *copy* in the archival register. In this matter, the Elephantine papyri are misleading, because they are original letters, and so naturally they do not have headings/notations containing the words for "copy" and "letter." Such headings/notations are added when the letters are copied into official registers (day-books, letter-books, etc.), such as the ones cited above.

V. THE CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING EZRA 4:7

Another question concerns 4:7 and its relationship to 4:8–16. Is 4:7 an introduction to what follows or does it speak of a separate letter? Is the גִּשְׁתָּן of Bishlam, Mithredath, and Tabeel (4:7) the same as the אֲגָרָה of Rehum and Shimshai (4:8) or different? Already in antiquity, there was no agreement on these questions. 1 Esdras (2:12) signals a one-letter interpretation by combining the names in Ezra 4:7 and 4:8 into a single list: Βεσλεμος καὶ Μιθραδάτης καὶ Ταβελλιος καὶ Ραουμος καὶ Βεελτέμος καὶ Σαμσαῖος ὁ γραμματεὺς.⁷⁴ The Peshitta, on the other hand, signals a two-letter interpretation by adding the conjunction *w-* at the beginning of Ezra 4:8. The same controversy exists in the Middle Ages. The commentaries attributed to R. Saadia Gaon (really R. Benjamin Anau) and to Rashi adopt a one-letter position, asserting that the letter of Rehum and Shimshai was written at the behest of and/or in the name of Mithredath-Tabael.⁷⁵ R. Isaiah of Trani, by contrast, adopts a two-letter position, commenting on רָחוּם בְּעַל טַעַם וּשְׁמֵי סַפְרָא that "they too, for their part, wrote another letter, concerning Jerusalem."⁷⁶

⁷² Porten, "Elephantine and the Bible," 55.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 56–57; see also the article cited in n. 71 above.

⁷⁴ According to most scholars, this translation reflects not a different textual tradition but rather an attempt to solve the exegetical problem.

⁷⁵ For the editions of the former commentary, see Menahem M. Kasher and Jacob B. Mandelbaum, *Sarei Ha-Elef* (Jerusalem: Beit Torah Shelemah, 1978), 1:154 (§§294 and 296). The latter commentary, in the Rabbinic Bible, has מִתְרַדָּת וְטַבְאֵל, but the *waw* cannot be correct, since this commentary, like other medieval commentaries, takes מִתְרַדָּת טַבְאֵל as the name of a single individual.

⁷⁶ Isaiah b. Mali di Trani, *Commentary on Prophets and Hagiographa* (in Hebrew; ed. A. J. Wertheimer; Jerusalem: Ketab yad wasepher, 1965–78), 3:243.

In the nineteenth century, we find C. F. Keil still struggling with these two possibilities:

This letter, too, of Bishlam and his companions seems to be omitted. There follows, indeed, in ver. 8, etc., a letter to King Artachshasta, of which a copy is given in vers. 11–16; but the names of the writers are different from those mentioned in ver. 7. The three names, Bishlam, Mithredath, and Tabeel (ver. 7), cannot be identified with the two names Rehum and Shimshai (ver. 8). When we consider, however, that the writers named in ver. 8 were high officials of the Persian king, sending to the monarch a written accusation against the Jews in their own and their associates' names, it requires but little stretch of the imagination to suppose that these personages were acting at the instance of the adversaries named in ver. 7, the Samaritans Bishlam, Mithredath, and Tabeel. . . .⁷⁷

Keil offers several arguments against the view that 4:7 is separate from 4:8:

with regard to the letter of ver. 7, we should have not a notion of its purport in case it were not the same which is given in ver. 8, etc. Besides, the statement concerning the Aramæan composition of this letter would have been utterly purposeless if the Aramæan letter following in ver. 8 had been an entirely different one. The information concerning the language in which the letter was written has obviously no other motive than to introduce its transcription in the original Aramæan. This conjecture becomes a certainty through the fact that the Aramæan letter follows in ver. 8 without a copula of any kind. If any other had been intended, the ו copulative would no more have been omitted here than in ver. 7. . . .⁷⁸

These arguments against the two-letter theory have not received sufficient attention. Most proponents of that theory ignore them.⁷⁹ Others respond by simply emending the text.⁸⁰ It is therefore not superfluous to revisit Keil's arguments.

The problem in v. 7 becomes clearer when we compare it with v. 6: ובמלכות ואחשורוש בתחלת מלכותו כתבו שטנה על ישיבי יהודה וירושלם, "and in the reign of

⁷⁷ C. F. Keil, *The Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (trans. S. Taylor; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1873), 63–64.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁷⁹ E.g., Herbert Edward Ryle, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893), 54; Alfred Bertholet, *Die Bücher Esra und Nehemia* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1902), 13; P. Andrés Fernández, *Comentario a los libros de Esdras y Nehemias* (Madrid: Consejo superior de investigaciones científicas, 1950), 112; Jacob M. Myers, *Ezra. Nehemiah: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 14; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 37; F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 71; D. J. A. Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (NCB; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1984), 77; Williamson, *Ezra*, 61; Blenkinsopp, *Ezra*, 111; and Joachim Becker, *Esra/Nehemiah* (NEchtB; Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1990), 30.

⁸⁰ W. Rudolph, *Esra und Nehemia* (HAT 20; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1949), 34, 42; J. J. Koopmans, "Het eerste Aramese gedeelte in Ezra (4:7-6:19)," *GTT* 55 (1955): 153; Bernard Chapira, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah and the Period of the Return to Zion* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Kiryat-Sefer, 1955), 42.

Ahasueras, at the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.” Here too the reference to a letter is very brief; even so, in this case there is enough information to convey the tenor of the letter. Verse 7, on the other hand, tells us nothing substantive about the letter to which it refers; it cannot possibly stand on its own. Some modern scholars argue that the biblical author was unable to say anything more about the letter because he did not have access to it. But if he could not even surmise its content, why did he bother to mention it? Why should this unknown letter be more noteworthy than hundreds of other unknown letters?

In short, this interpretation creates a literary absurdity—a vacuous reference to an irrelevant document. No wonder that ancient and medieval exegetes (2 Esdras, Peshitta, “Rashi,” Benjamin Anau) turned the name **בשלם** into a description of the content of the letter by taking it to mean “in peace”—even though that interpretation is linguistically anomalous in several respects and, in its simplest form, would seem to undermine the authors’ point about the hostility of the people of the land.⁸¹

Another literary absurdity created by this interpretation concerns the notice that the letter was written in Aramaic (Ezra 4:7b).⁸² If the author did not have access to the letter, how did he know what language it was written in?⁸³ And why was the language significant? Why did the author mention it in 4:7 but not in 4:6? In other words, 4:7b is pointless unless it serves to introduce the next letter.⁸⁴ It can hardly be a coincidence that the statement that the letter was in Aramaic is followed by a letter in Aramaic.

VI. EZRA 4:7: INTRODUCTION TO AN ARCHIVAL SEARCH REPORT FROM NEHEMIAH’S TIME

In my opinion, there is some truth in both the one-letter theory and the two-letter theory. The **נשתון** of 4:7 is neither identical to the **אגרה** of 4:8–16 nor completely distinct from it. There is a third possibility: the **נשתון** of 4:7 includes the letter of Rehum and Shimshai in 4:8–16, but it also includes the other three letters in chs. 4–6.

⁸¹ See my article, forthcoming in *JBL*, on the origin of the name “Bishlam.”

⁸² See further below.

⁸³ See already Ernst Bertheau, *Die Bücher Esra, Nechemia und Ester* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1862), 7.

⁸⁴ Scholars have rightly compared **אֲרַמִּית וּמִתְרַגְּמֵי אֲרַמִּית** (Ezra 4:7b) with **וַיְדַבְּרוּ הַכַּשְׂדִּים לְמֶלֶךְ אֲרַמִּית** (Dan 2:4a). Both are literary devices designed to prepare the reader for the change of language. Some scholars put a period before **אֲרַמִּית** in one or both of these passages, but, to my taste, this is an act of literary vandalism. In both places, it turns a smooth, elegant transition into an abrupt, awkward one, leaving a gaping hole before the period and an incongruous linguistic label after it. See further below.

The fourfold-*נשתון* theory is not new. Seventy-five years ago, Schaefer wrote:

The fact that, contrary to what one would expect, the introduction to Tabʿel's letter—address and greeting formula—is not given, but instead there follows immediately a new document, the petition of the Samaritan officials, ought not lead to the view that the author has already moved on from Tabʿel's letter to another. The only admissible conclusion is rather that the petition of the two officials was included in Tabʿel's letter as an important component.⁸⁵

Indeed, the same view is implicit in a nineteenth-century encyclopedia article by A. Klostermann.⁸⁶ However, Klostermann and Schaefer combined it with a bold new theory, viz., that 4:8–6:18 is a response to the accusation of Rehum and Shimshai, an apology written by a Jew named Tabeel.⁸⁷ The problems with the apology theory have been noted by many scholars and need not be rehearsed here. From our point of view, the only important point is that the fourfold-*נשתון* theory and the apology theory were treated as inseparable by scholars on both sides of the debate. Thus, when the apology theory was eventually discarded by scholars, the baby got thrown out with the bathwater.

The fourfold-*נשתון* theory can and should be detached from the Klostermann-Schaefer apology theory and joined instead to Meyer's archive theory. The collection of Aramaic documents⁸⁸ in chs. 4–6 constitutes not a partisan apology but a dispassionate report conveying the results of an archival search. The officials named in 4:7 were apparently the keepers of a major archive (or perhaps the keepers and their secretary) in Across-the-River or Babylon.⁸⁹ They had been asked by Artaxerxes

⁸⁵ Schaefer, *Iranische Beiträge*, 17.

⁸⁶ A. Klostermann, "Esra und Nehemia," *RE*, 5:516–17.

⁸⁷ Not Bishlam, Mithredath, and Tabeel. According to them, *כתב בשלם מתרדת טבאל* means "Tabeel wrote with the approval of Mithredath," but this philologically problematic interpretation is quite unnecessary; see again my forthcoming article on the origin of the name "Bishlam."

⁸⁸ For the later connecting narrative, see below.

⁸⁹ In Greco-Roman Egypt, district archives had two keepers (*βιβλιοφύλακες*) and a secretary (*γραμματεὺς βιβλιοφύλακων*), who was the real administrator; see B. A. van Groningen, *A Family-Archive from Tebtunis* (*Papyrologica Lugduno-Batava* 6; Leiden: Brill, 1950), 106–7. For the *βιβλιοφύλακες*, see also Briant, *From Cyrus*, 412; Posner, *Archives*, 134, 141, 147, 151, 154; and Erwin Seidl, *Rechtsgeschichte Ägyptens als römischer Provinz* (Sankt Augustin, Germany: H. Richarz, 1973), 73–77. A more revealing title is given in Strabo's *Geography* (2.1.6 §69). There we learn that Xenocles, the treasurer (*γασοφύλαξ*) of Alexander the Great made the latter's description of India available to the Macedonian general Patrocles. It is generally accepted that Xenocles was the keeper of the royal archives in Babylon (PW, 1508, s.v. Xenokles; Posner, *Archives*, 128). The use of the term *γασοφύλαξ* for an archivist is explained by Ezra 5:17, 6:1, where we learn that at Babylon the royal archives were in the treasury (*בית גזר* = *οἶκος τῆς γάζης* in 2 Esdras); cf. the treasury (*γασοφύλακτιον*) of 1 Macc 14:48–49, where copies (*ἀντίγραφα*) of a decree were deposited. Since *γασοφύλαξ* is just the Greek equivalent of *גזבר* (see 1 Esdr 2:8; 8:19 = Ezra 1:8; 7:21), it seems likely that the keeper of the Babylon archives who searched for Cyrus's edict at the behest of Darius bore the title *גזבר*. It is possible that Bishlam had the same title, especially if he was in Babylon rather than Across-the-River.

xerxes to search their archive for records relating to the rebuilding of Jerusalem. I suggest that this was around the time when Nehemiah reopened the question of Jerusalem's wall. The issue had been left hanging by Artaxerxes' decree that the work on the wall be stopped—that is, suspended—“until I give the order.”⁹⁰ Before issuing that decree, Artaxerxes had ordered a search of the archives (Ezra 4:19), and it seems reasonable to assume that a new search would be necessary before a new decree could be issued allowing the work to resume. In the course of their search, Bishlam and his colleagues found four relevant letters.⁹¹ They copied them onto a new roll, which they sent to the king.⁹² As noted above, each of the four letters contains a reference to the searching of archives (4:15; 4:19; 5:16; and 6:1), and so it is somewhat surprising that the collection of these letters has not previously been identified as an archival search report.

One of the great virtues of our theory is that it (and only it) allows us to make sense of a very obscure clause: *וכתב הנשתון כתוב ארמית ומתרגם ארמית*. The problems are obvious: *כתב הנשתון* seems to be a pleonasm, a genitive phrase composed of two near synonyms;⁹³ *כתוב ארמית ומתרגם ארמית* seems to be a tautology or an oxymoron. As a result, Meyer viewed the clause as “completely senseless” and corrupt, and he emended it to *והנשתון כתוב פרסית ומתרגם ארמית*.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Cf. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra*, 115: “Unlike ‘the laws of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked’ (Dan. 6:8; cf. Esth. 1:19; 8:8), the decree allows for a future abrogation. . . .”

⁹¹ The earlier correspondence was, of course, less relevant insofar as it dealt with the rebuilding of the temple rather than the city wall. Nevertheless, even the rebuilding of the temple had strategic ramifications, for, in the words of Josephus, “the Temple lay as a fortress over the city” (*War* 5.5.8 §245). According to Olmstead (*History*, 139–40), Tattenai hinted at the danger by referring to “hewn stones” and “timbers . . . being set in the wall”: “This was an unusually strong construction; the temple mount could serve as a fortress in time of revolt. . . .” Thus, the decision of Cyrus and Darius to encourage the rebuilding of the temple was a valid precedent for Artaxerxes. Moreover, as Porten (“Documents,” 184, 195) has noted, both sets of correspondence deal with an important underlying issue: Why was Jerusalem—and its temple—destroyed in the first place (4:15 vs. 5:12)? In any event, the archivists undoubtedly preferred to err on the side of providing too much information rather than too little; judgments of relevance were best left to the king.

⁹² My first encounter with this type of document came when I was researching the history of papyrus Amherst 63 (the Aramaic text in Demotic script). One of the records in the archive of the Pierpont Morgan Library was a “copy of all correspondence found in Estate files, relating to the AMHERST PAPYRI” prepared by a secretary in 1922 at the behest of Belle da Costa Greene, the head of the Library.

⁹³ Elsewhere in the Bible, this construction has a rhetorical function, expressing “poetic hyperbole”; see Yitzhak Avishur, *Stylistic Studies of Word-Pairs in Biblical and Ancient Semitic Literatures* (AOAT 210; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1984), 182. In our case, no rhetorical function is apparent. According to Meyer (*Entstehung*, 18), *כתב* is an old gloss to the Persian word *נשתון*. Blenkinsopp (*Ezra*, 110), while agreeing with Meyer, confuses the issue by implying that *כְּתַב* can be a verb despite the vocalization with *qames*: “MT reads, ‘and he wrote the letter written in Aramaic,’ which is impossible.”

⁹⁴ Meyer, *Entstehung*, 18; idem, *Papyrusfund*, 18–19 n. 3.

Meyer was unable to make sense of all this verbiage, because he assumed that 4:7 refers to a simple letter written in Aramaic. I suggest that the complexity of the verbiage is a reflection of the complexity of the document to which it refers. The *גִּשְׁתוֹן*, “letter,” of Bishlam and his colleagues contains a *כְּתוּב*, “written document,” consisting of four letters. Of those four, the letter of Rehum and Shimshai was no doubt written (i.e., composed) in Aramaic from the outset, while the letters of Artaxerxes and Darius (and perhaps the letter of Tattenai as well) were translated into Aramaic from Old Persian. We can thus translate without doing any violence to the text: “The document (embedded) in the letter was (in part) written in Aramaic and (in part) translated into Aramaic.”⁹⁵ It is no longer necessary to break up the clause or emend it or twist the meaning of its words.

It is tempting to try to determine more precisely when Bishlam, Mithredath, and Tabeel sent their report. Was it after Nehemiah spoke to the king (year 20) or before? And if the latter, was it after Nehemiah’s brother Hanani⁹⁶ arrived with Jews from Jerusalem (Neh 1:2) or before? In this connection, we may mention Schaefer’s conjecture that Tabeel’s letter was delivered to Nehemiah by the Jews from Jerusalem before Nehemiah went in to see Artaxerxes.⁹⁷

Whatever the precise sequence of events, it seems fair to say that the archival search report cleared the way for Nehemiah’s mission. The report made several things crystal clear: (1) the king had ordered a suspension of work on Jerusalem’s wall “until I give the order,” not a permanent cessation; (2) the sole reason for the suspension was an allegation that the Jews had been rebellious in the distant past and hence could not be trusted now; and (3) in the more recent past, the king’s ancestors had decided to trust the Jews to build a fortress-like⁹⁸ temple, and yet the enemies of the Jews were unable to cite a single adverse consequence of that decision. In short, the report showed that the king’s former concerns had been baseless, and that it was safe to allow the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s wall to resume—especially if the work was supervised by a man like Nehemiah, whom the king knew and trusted.⁹⁹

All of this raises further questions. What was Nehemiah’s role in the commis-

⁹⁵ I found a similar heading on the Internet: “Manx hymns or songs for the use of temperance meetings, and several pieces of poetry suitable on other occasions. Partly composed originally in Manx and partly translated from the English language, by John Quirk, parish of Patrick.”

⁹⁶ This name seems to have been very popular during the reign of Artaxerxes I. The Bible mentions three contemporaries of Ezra and Nehemiah named *חַנַּנִּי*. There are twelve to thirteen individuals named *Ḥa-(an-)na-ni-* in the Murašū archive from Nippur (Artaxerxes I–Darius II); see Michael David Coogan, *West Semitic Personal Names in the Murašū Documents* (HSM 7; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), 24–25; and Ran Zadok, *The Jews in Babylonia in the Chaldean and Achaemenian Periods in the Light of the Babylonian Sources* (Tel-Aviv: Mifal Hashichpul, 1976), 11.

⁹⁷ Schaefer, *Iranische Beiträge*, 19–20.

⁹⁸ See n. 91 above.

⁹⁹ It is telling that Artaxerxes did not stop the work again when Nehemiah’s enemies spread rumors that he was rebuilding the wall in order to rebel (Neh 6:6–7).

sioning of the archival search? Did Nehemiah push for it, openly or behind the scenes, as part of a policy review? Did he send Hanani, his brother and right-hand man (cf. Neh 7:2), to get the report and/or a first-hand look at the situation on the ground? Did he bring a copy of the report with him to Jerusalem when he was sent there as governor? It is only to the last question that can we give an answer supported by evidence. As we have seen, the author of the second Hanukkah letter at the beginning of 2 Maccabees (2:13) makes the not unreasonable claim that Nehemiah had “letters of kings concerning votive offerings” in his βιβλιοθήκη.

VII. REVERSE CHRONOLOGICAL ORDERING

Scholars have long been puzzled by the internal arrangement of the first Aramaic section of Ezra, specifically the fact that the Darius correspondence comes *after* the Artaxerxes correspondence.¹⁰⁰ It is clear that the Darius in question is Darius I,¹⁰¹ who preceded Artaxerxes I. If so, the documents are not in chronological order. Why not? According to Jacob Liver:

One common explanation is that the writer did not understand his sources and did not know the chronology of the period whose history he was writing. . . . But even if we assume that . . . the author was not well versed in the history of the time, what reason did he have to change the order that he found in his sources?¹⁰²

Porten answers this question by arguing that the biblical author arranged 4:8–7:26 thematically, proceeding from the least favorable (the letter of Rehum and Shimshai) to the most favorable (Ezra’s letter of appointment).¹⁰³ However, he does not explain why the author decided to shift abruptly from chronological order to thematic order. Nor does he account for what is almost certainly a resumptive repetition in 4:24.¹⁰⁴

The internal arrangement of Ezra 4–6 is a serious problem for the view that it is based on an Aramaic chronicle.¹⁰⁵ It is not a problem for our proposal that Ezra

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, the discussion in David A. Glatt, *Chronological Displacement in Biblical and Related Literatures* (SBLDS 139; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 125–31, and the references cited there. I am indebted to Barry L. Eichler for this reference.

¹⁰¹ See Jacob Liver, “On the Problem of the Order of the Persian Kings in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah” (in Hebrew), in *Studies in Bible and Judean Desert Scrolls* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1971), 271; and the literature on Tattannu = Tattenai cited in n. 7 above.

¹⁰² Liver, “Problem,” 270. See also Hans H. Mallau, “The Redaction of Ezra 4–6: A Plea for a Theology of Scribes,” *PRSt* 15 (1988): 78: “it is . . . unlikely that the redactor would have changed the original chronological sequence of a collection of written documents.”

¹⁰³ Porten, “Documents,” 194; idem, “Theme and Structure of *Ezra* 1–6: From Literature to History,” *Transeuphratène* 23 (2002): 36–37.

¹⁰⁴ See below.

¹⁰⁵ This is the view of Bertheau, *Ezra*, 6–7 (“in chronologischer Ordnung”); Ryle, *Ezra*, 54; Chapira, *Ezra*, 42; and Clines, *Ezra*, 8.

4–6 is based on an archival search report. Outside of chronicles and day-books, reverse chronological order is not as uncommon as one might think. Among the texts from Egypt dealing with archives, I have found several judicial reports containing documents arranged in that way.

The inscription of Mes, inscribed on the walls of his tomb at Saqqara, is “the official *verbatim* report of a single lawsuit brought by Mes against a man named Khay.”¹⁰⁶ This lawsuit, through which Mes won back his ancestral estates, took place in the time of Ramesses II (thirteenth century B.C.E.). Alan H. Gardiner believes that it was the fifth of a series of lawsuits stretching back to the reign of Horemhab (late fourteenth century B.C.E.).¹⁰⁷ We have already seen that one section of the report contains a description of an archival search. The final section of the report, inscribed on the south wall of the tomb, consists of two documents, apparently submitted in evidence at the trial by Mes.¹⁰⁸ According to Gardiner, the first of these documents is a “fragment of the *procès verbal* belonging to the *third* lawsuit,” while the second (which has a heading that parallels the heading in Ezra 4:9–11a)¹⁰⁹ is a “report made by the commissioner Iniy to the Great Qenbet, relative to the *second* lawsuit.”¹¹⁰ Thus, the documents are presented in reverse chronological order.

Three additional examples of reverse chronological order are found in a family archive from Greco-Roman Egypt (Tebtunis). One is a long Greek text from 115 C.E. labeled “copy of report with annexed documents” by its editor.¹¹¹ This is a report ordered by a judge in a case about an archive and its keepers. As noted above, four of the appended documents have headings that begin with the words Ἀντίγραφον ἐπιστολῆς, “copy of letter,” recalling אגרתא אגרתא in Ezra 5:6. Another has a heading that begins with the words Ἀντίγραφον ὑπομνηματισμῶν, “copy of memorandum/record,” reminiscent of the heading דברונא in Ezra 6:2.

The document is described by Willy Clarysse:

How, then, was order kept in the archives of government offices in Graeco-Roman Egypt? We get a vivid picture of state record-keeping because of a dispute which dragged on from AD 90 to 124 as a result of bad record-keeping in the Arsinoite nome. The situation is described as follows by the former keepers of the public archives (βιβλιοφύλακες τῆς δημοσίας βιβλιοθήκης): “Of the acts some have been lost, being torn and worn by age, others have been partly damaged, and several have been eaten away at the top because the places are hot.” In AD 98 the prefect Junius Rufus ordered that the new keepers of the record office (βιβλιοθήκη) should accept the damaged rolls and have them pasted together at their predecessors’ expense. Finally, after a series of lawsuits, the cost of repairing the

¹⁰⁶ Gardiner, *Inscription of Mes*, 24.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁰⁹ See below.

¹¹⁰ Gardiner, *Inscription of Mes*, 31.

¹¹¹ Groningen, *Family-Archive*, 46–61 text 15; cf. 97–106.

rolls was paid from the sequestered property of the heirs of the record-keepers and their secretary.¹¹²

We may display the structure of the text as follows:

1. Report on the cost of repairing archival records. **115** C.E. “Here follow the copies of all the documents.”
2. Letter of Sulpicius Similis, prefect of Egypt. **108** C.E. “I have sent you a docketed petition.”
3. “And of the petition: To Servius Sulpicius Similis. . .” [**undated, but clearly earlier than 2 and later than 4**]. “A copy of [a letter to Junius Rufus, prefect of Egypt] is subjoined.
4. “Copy of letter: To Junius Rufus. . .” **98** C.E. “We also subjoined for you a copy of a letter concerning a similar case.”
5. “Copy of a letter in a similar case.” **83** C.E.
6. “Copy of the letter written in answer to those above. Junius Rufus to . . .” **98** C.E.
7. “Copy of letter.” **103** C.E.
8. “Copy of record in the journal of Leonides . . .” **109** C.E.

It will be noted that documents 1–5 appear in reverse chronological order. It is true that the order here is attributable to a structural feature that is not present in Ezra 4–6: each document is included in an appendix of the previous one.¹¹³ Even so, the text is quite important for us. Taken together with the inscription of Mes, it shows that reverse chronological order is at home in ancient reports containing multiple documents.

The second example of reverse chronological order from the Tebtunis family archive is a petition to the nomarch containing three documents.¹¹⁴ The first document is dated 26-vii-182 C.E., the second 17-vii-182 C.E., and the third 26-xii-181 C.E. In this case, too, each document is included in an appendix of the previous one. The third example from the archive has two preserved documents, a “copy of petition” dated 10-xi-189 C.E. followed by a “copy of census-return” dated 188–189 C.E.¹¹⁵ In this example, the documents are independent of each other, as they are in Ezra 4–6.

¹¹² Clarysse, “*Tomoi*,” 344–45; cf. Bell, “Custody,” 122–23.

¹¹³ In other words, the ordering originates in a bureaucratic/legalistic habit: each writer felt the need to append a complete copy of an *earlier* letter, even if it itself had an appendix. Thus, the writer of 4 appended 5; then the writer of 3 appended 4-5; after that the writer of 2 appended 3-4-5, finally the writer of 1 appended 2-3-4-5. This is, therefore, an example of iterative literary embedding, for which see below. The structure of many e-mail messages today is similar, except that in them the appended letter is normally the one to which the writer is replying.

¹¹⁴ Groningen, *Family-Archive*, 145–49 text 43.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 149–52 text 44.

Reverse chronological order in an archival search report may reflect the order in which the search was carried out. One factor that may cause the archivist to search in reverse chronological order is accessibility. Old records are often less accessible than recent ones, either because they are at the bottom of a pile or because they have been moved to a remote storage facility for inactive files. If the search begins with the more accessible recent records, and the relevant records are copied onto a new scroll as they are found, the result will be reverse chronological order, as in the field notes from the excavation of a *tell*.

Another factor that may cause the archivist to search in reverse chronological order is relevance. A search for documents relevant to the present naturally begins with recent records and works backwards. This is a commonsense principle familiar to the present-day heirs of the ancient archivists. A recent article by a reference librarian lists “Ten Skills Needed by Graduate Students Conducting Research in the Information Age,” including: “Work in Reverse Chronological Order, searching the newest information first.”¹¹⁶ The designers of the Harvard OnLine Library Information System (HOLLIS) evidently agree; in default mode, it displays the results of searches in reverse chronological order.

It is impossible to know how common this order was in archival searches and search reports of the Persian period. I know of only one example from that period. According to Ezra 6:1–2, the search for Cyrus’s decree began in Babylon and concluded in Ecbatana, where Cyrus had stayed before his first official year.¹¹⁷ Clearly, this particular search proceeded in reverse chronological order. That order is not reflected in the report, since only one record was found.

In our case, considerations of accessibility and relevance would have conspired to generate reverse chronological order. Certainly, Artaxerxes’ records would have been more accessible to Artaxerxes’ archivists than Darius’s records. They would also have been more relevant than Darius’s records. The archivists can hardly have been unaware of the fact that all of the events that led to the suspension had occurred during Artaxerxes’ reign, within the previous two decades.¹¹⁸ Indeed, they were probably instructed to look for Artaxerxes’ stop-work order plus any other documents that seemed relevant to them.

It is therefore reasonable to assume that, in carrying out the new search, the archivists first looked for and found the Artaxerxes correspondence and that, after those letters were copied onto a leather or papyrus roll, the earlier correspondence involving Darius turned up and was copied onto the same roll. Even if they didn’t find the Artaxerxes correspondence first, they would still have had good reason to

¹¹⁶ Christy A. Donaldson, “Information Literacy and the McKinsey Model: The McKinsey Strategic Problem-Solving Model Adapted to Teach Information Literacy to Graduate Business Students,” *Library Philosophy and Practice* (e-journal) 6, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 2.

¹¹⁷ Olmstead, *History*, 140.

¹¹⁸ For the view that the events occurred at the beginning of Artaxerxes’ reign, see Mordechai Zer-Kavod, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Reuben Mass, 1949), 47.

put it first in their report. As we have noted, it was more relevant, inasmuch as it dealt with rebuilding Jerusalem's wall rather than its temple. Either way, reverse chronological order is quite natural.

VIII. MULTIPLE INTRODUCTIONS AND ITERATIVE EMBEDDING

It has often been noted that Ezra 4:9–11a does not continue from the point where v. 8 leaves off; these verses have the appearance of a second introduction that partially overlaps the first. D. J. A. Clines writes: “The letter is prefaced, rather awkwardly, by two introductions.”¹¹⁹ L. H. Brockington goes further: “there are virtually three introductions or prefaces to the letter.”¹²⁰ A single introduction, conveying the same information, might have looked something like this:

*אדין רחום בעל טעם ושמשי ספרא ושאר כנותהון—דיניא ואפרסתכיא
טרפליא אפרסיא ארכוי בבליא שושנביא דהוא עלמיא ושאר אמיא די הגלי
אסנפר רבא ויקירא והותב המו בקריה די שמרין ושאר עבר נהרה—כתבו
אגרה חדה על ירושלם לארתחששתא מלכא. דנה פרשגן אגרתא די שלחו
עלוהי.

It has not been noted that the redundant introductions of Rehum's letter are paralleled at Elephantine, in a document of the Jedaniah archive mentioned above (*TAD* A4.9 Cowley 32). The document is a memorandum, believed to have been composed by the messenger who carried the letters of Jedaniah to Bagohi and Delaiah, governors of Judah and Samaria.¹²¹ It appears that Bagohi and Delaiah gave the messenger an oral reply, which he recorded in a memorandum. The document begins as follows:

¹זכרן זי בגוהי ודליה אמרו
²לי זכרן לם יהוי לך במצרין לממר
³קדם ארשם....

Porten translates: “Memorandum. What Bagavahya and Delaiah said to me. Memorandum. Saying, ‘Let it be for you in Egypt to say before Arsames. . . .’”¹²² The repetition of the word זכרן, “memorandum,” shows that this is a double heading. Pierre

¹¹⁹ Clines, *Ezra*, 78.

¹²⁰ L. H. Brockington, *Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther* (London: Nelson, 1969), 74. This sounds like the view of Batten quoted above, but, unlike Batten, Brockington begins counting with the introduction in v. 8! See also Blenkinsopp, *Ezra*, 112.

¹²¹ Pierre Grelot, *Documents araméens d'Égypte* (Paris: Cerf, 1972), 415.

¹²² Bezalel Porten, *The Elephantine Papyri in English* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 148 = COS 3:130.

Grelot explains that the document “bears traces of alteration, notably the addition of a heading at the moment when the document was deposited in the archives.”¹²³ In other words, the original heading written by the messenger in the field was simply “Memorandum”; subsequently, before depositing the document in the archive, he added a longer, more informative, heading: “Memorandum of what Bagothi and Delaiah said to me.”¹²⁴ We see, then, that archival documents can have multiple headings, because archival headings are added to documents that may already have a heading.

Now Ezra 4:7–11 is a much more complex case, since the archival record at its core has been incorporated into other documents. Nevertheless, I suggest that the same principle is at work there, together with a second, more general principle: multiple headings and introductions can be a by-product of iterative embedding. My contention is that the multiple introductions of Ezra 4:7–11 belong to documents embedded one within the other, that is, quotations within quotations.

To clarify this point, let us first examine the literary structure of Gen 32:5: ויצו אתם לאמר כה תאמרון לאדני לעשו כה אמר עבדך יעקב עם לבן גרתי ואחר עד עתה, “and he commanded them as follows, ‘Thus shall you say to my lord Esau, ‘Thus says your servant Jacob: ‘I have been staying with Laban, tarrying until now. . . .’” Here a single message has three introductions, as a by-product of iterative embedding.¹²⁵ In this case, all of the embedded quotations end at the same point, as shown by the clustering of quotation marks at the end. We may display the levels of embedding as follows:

- I. ויצו אתם לאמר
 II. כה תאמרון לאדני לעשו¹²⁶
 III. כה אמר עבדך יעקב
 IV. עם לבן גרתי ואחר עד עתה:

There are three verbs of speaking here (אמר, תאמרון, ויצו), each introducing the speech that begins one level below. The verb ויצו on level I belongs to the narrator’s introduction; תאמרון on level II belongs to Jacob’s introduction; and אמר on level III belongs to the messengers’ introduction. Level IV is the message itself.

A more instructive example of embedding is found in 2 Sam 11:25: ויאמר דוד אל המלאך כה תאמר אל יואב . . . החזק מלחמתך אל העיר והרסה וחזקהו

¹²³ Grelot, *Documents*, 415.

¹²⁴ For a fuller discussion of the literary history of this document, see Appendix 3 below.

¹²⁵ We are discussing a *literary* phenomenon here, but it has a parallel in the syntactic constructions that generative grammarians classify as “left-branching,” for example, *John’s friend’s uncle’s yacht*. Here too an iterative process yields “multiple introductions.” In a generative literary theory, Gen 32:5 would be the output of a recursive rule like *letter* → *introduction* + *letter*.

¹²⁶ Some translations and commentaries assign לעשו לאדני to level III. This does not affect our point in any way.

ing, one may be misled into translating: “David said to the messenger, ‘Thus shall you say to Joab: “. . . strengthen your attack against the city and destroy it and strengthen it.’” In this reading, וחזקהו, “and strengthen it,” seems either redundant (coming after החזק מלחמתך, “strengthen your attack”) or incoherent (coming after הרסה, “destroy it”)—not to mention ungrammatical (with its masculine suffixed pronoun referring to a feminine noun). The problems vanish once we become aware of the embedding:

- I. ויאמר דוד אל המלאך
 II. כה תאמר אל יואב
 III. . . החזק מלחמתך אל העיר והרסה
 II. וחזקהו:

As shown in the diagram, וחזקהו belongs not to level III but to level II, where it continues כה תאמר אל יואב and refers to the strengthening (i.e., encouraging)¹²⁷ of Joab.

In my view, the problems of Ezra 4:7–11—ostensible redundancy and lack of coherence—that have puzzled readers since ancient times have a similar origin. They are by-products of literary embedding—or, rather, of a failure to perceive this embedding. Once we activate our literary depth perception, four levels become visible:

- I. ובימי ארתחששתא כתב בשלם מתרדת טבאל ושאר כנותו על
 ארתחששתא מלך פרס וכתב הנשתון כתוב ארמית ומתרגם ארמית:
 II. רחום בעל טעם ושמשי ספרא כתבו אגרה חדה על ירושלם
 לארתחששתא מלכא כנמא:
 III. אדין רחום בעל טעם ושמשי ספרא ושאר כנותהון
 דיניא ואפרסתכיא טרפליא אפרסיא ארכוי בבליא
 שושנכיא דהיא (דהוא) עלמיא: ושאר אמיא די הגלי
 אסנפר רבא ויקירא והותב המו בקריה די שמרין ושאר
 עבר נהרה . . . :
 — דנה פרשגן אגרתא די שלחו עלוהי
 ↓ ↓
 II. וכענת: דנה פרשגן אגרתא די שלחו עלוהי
 IV. על ארתחששתא מלכא עבדיך אנש עבר
 נהרה וכענת:

Level I (v. 7) is the biblical author’s Hebrew introduction to the core of the Aramaic section that follows, viz., the archival search report sent by Bishlam,

¹²⁷ Cf. וחזקהו in Deut 3:28.

Mithredath, and Tabeel to Artaxerxes (without the added narrative). Level II (v. 8) is the introduction of Bishlam, Mithredath, and Tabeel to the first document in their report, the letter of Rehum and Shimshai. Level III is the heading of the letter of Rehum and Shimshai in the archival register-roll. We shall argue below that that heading originally began with a date instead of אֲדִין. Moreover, it originally had the form of a *casus pendens* construction, encompassing vv. 9–11a.¹²⁸ However, Bishlam and his colleagues broke up that construction by inserting וּכְעֵנַת, thereby detaching the words דְּנָה פֶּרֶשְׁגָן אֲגָרְתָא דִּי שְׁלַחוּ עִלּוּהִי from the preceding noun phrase and, in effect, “bumping” them up to level II (as shown by the arrows in the diagram). Level IV is, of course, the letter itself, beginning with the address formula.

To some extent, the literary complexity of our passage is a reflection of bureaucratic complexity, with the four levels corresponding to three layers of bureaucracy. Readers in the Achaemenid period would have had far less difficulty than modern scholars in perceiving the layered structure of Ezra 4:7–11, because they were accustomed to such structures. We can demonstrate this with two examples from that period.

The first example is an Elamite letter from the royal archives at Persepolis: “Speak to Harrena, the chief of livestock: ‘Parnaka says: “King Darius has given me a command, saying: ‘Give Princess Irtashduna (Artystone) one hundred sheep from my house.’”’”¹²⁹ As in Gen 32:5, the four quotation marks at the end of this translation correspond to four levels:

- I. Speak to Harrena, the chief of livestock:
- II. Parnaka says:
- III. King Darius has given me a command, saying:
- IV. Give Princess Irtashduna (Artystone) one hundred sheep from my house.

Here too the four levels correspond to three layers of bureaucracy.

¹²⁸ So Arnold B. Ehrlich, *מקרא כפשוטו* (Berlin: M. Poppelauer, 1899–1901), 2:408 lines 1–2. Keil’s view is similar: “The verb to אֲדִין is wanting; this follows in ver. 11, but as an anacoluthon, after an enumeration of the names in 9 and 10 with שְׁלַחוּ” (*Ezra*, 65). We may compare the *casus pendens* construction in 6:13: אֲדִין תַּתְּנִי פַחַת עֶבֶר נְהַרָה שְׁתֵּר בּוֹזְנֵי וּכְנֹתְהוֹן—לְקַבֵּל דִּי שְׁלַח דְּרִישׁ מַלְכָא (*Ezra*, 65). We may compare the *casus pendens* construction in 6:13: אֲדִין תַּתְּנִי פַחַת עֶבֶר נְהַרָה שְׁתֵּר בּוֹזְנֵי וּכְנֹתְהוֹן—לְקַבֵּל דִּי שְׁלַח דְּרִישׁ מַלְכָא, “Then Tattenai, governor of Across-the-River, Shethar-bozenai and their colleagues—as King Darius wrote, so they did diligently.” If the original archival heading had the form of a *casus pendens* construction, וּכְעֵנַת (v. 10) must have been added at a later stage. And if the original heading contained no referent for the pronoun of עִלּוּהִי (v. 11), that word must replace an original אֲדִין תַּתְּנִי פַחַת עֶבֶר נְהַרָה שְׁתֵּר בּוֹזְנֵי וּכְנֹתְהוֹן—לְקַבֵּל דִּי שְׁלַח דְּרִישׁ מַלְכָא, as assumed in the diagram on p. 673 below. The second point is a minor detail which I have ignored in the diagram on p. 667 (with its accompanying discussion) in order to avoid unnecessary complications.

¹²⁹ George G. Cameron, “Darius’ Daughter and the Persepolis Inscriptions,” *JNES* 1 (1942): 216; Briant, *From Cyrus*, 425–26, 446, 920, 939–40.

The second example, Prince Arsames's boat repair authorization,¹³⁰ is more complex. John David Whitehead has argued that this order is part of a five-stage administrative process, with each stage involving three to four layers of bureaucracy.¹³¹ The structure of the first stage is somewhat controversial owing to a lacuna. Here is Porten's translation: "From Arsames to Wahpremakhi. And now, ...[...] to us, saying 'Mithradates the boatholder thus says: 'Psamsinei[t ... and PN ... all (told) two, the boatholders of] the Carians, thus said: 'The boat which we hold-in-hereditary-lease—time has come its NEEDS to d[o].'''"¹³²

Here again, the four quotation marks at the end correspond to four levels:

- I. From Arsames to Wahpremakhi: And now, ...[...] to us, saying:
- II. Mithradates the boatholder thus says:
- III. Psamsinei[t ... and PN ... all (told) two, the boatholders of] the Carians, thus said:
- IV. The boat which we hold-in-hereditary-lease—time has come its NEEDS to d[o].

In level I, Arsames introduces the report of a subordinate whose name is lost;¹³³ in level II, the subordinate introduces Mithradates' report; in level III, Mithradates introduces the report of Psamsinei and another boatholder; in level IV, we finally get to the heart of the matter: the report of Psamsinei and his partner that their boat needs repair. These four levels correspond to four layers of bureaucracy in reporting the need for repair. The boatholders of the Carians (Psamsinei and partner) report the problem (the need for repair) to their superior (Mithradates, the chief boatholder), who informs his superior (name unknown), who reports to the satrap (Prince Arsames).¹³⁴

IX. THE SYNTAX OF DATES AND THE DATE-SUBSTITUTE "THEN"

It has frequently been noted that the use of the adverb אָדִין, "then," at the beginning of 4:9 is highly problematic. Following אָדִין we expect a clause informing us what happened after Rehum and Shimshai wrote the letter mentioned in v. 8, but instead we find a long noun phrase extending from טַעַם בְּעַל רְחוּם to וְשָׂאֵר עִבְרֵי נְהַרָּה. The problem is not solved by taking that noun phrase as part of a *casus pendens* construction;¹³⁵ אָדִין still seems out of place.¹³⁶

¹³⁰ See also above.

¹³¹ Whitehead, "Epistolography," 124.

¹³² Porten, *Elephantine Papyri in English*, 115–16.

¹³³ Whitehead (*Epistolography*, 130) believes that the name is *Bel-?*..., but see Porten, *Elephantine Papyri in English*, 116 nn. 3–4.

¹³⁴ See Briant, *From Cyrus*, 449–50; and Whitehead, *Epistolography*, 124.

¹³⁵ See at n. 128 above.

¹³⁶ Contrast the אָדִין in 6:13.

As a result, the word אֲדִין in this context has been labeled “senseless” (*sinnlos*) by many scholars, beginning with Meyer.¹³⁷ Meyer conjectured that the verb כתב had fallen out following אֲדִין.¹³⁸ A few scholars have followed him in retaining אֲדִין. One scholar writes that אֲדִין should not be changed because it is the *lectio difficilior*,¹³⁹ and another believes that אֲדִין differentiates the letter of 4:9–16 from the one of 4:8.¹⁴⁰ However, these are distinctly minority views; most of the solutions that have been proposed for the problems of these verses involve emending אֲדִין, transferring it elsewhere, or simply deleting it. Williamson writes:

The verse starts אֲדִין “then,” after which we expect a verb. RV and RSV supply “wrote,” but this makes the passage into a doublet of v 8 for no apparent reason. Others tacitly omit the word (e.g., NEB, NIV), while Bertholet regards it as a confused doublet of דִּינִיָּא “judges,” and Rudolph emends it to דִּי אֲנֹנִי “they (the senders) were.” If it is right to regard this fuller list of names as originating from some part of the document separate from the main text, such as the address or summary . . . , then we do not expect אֲדִין here or any amended form either. It may tentatively be suggested that, owing to the identical openings of the two verses, it came to be misplaced in the course of transmission from the start of v 8, where it fits naturally and where its loss has created a certain abruptness.¹⁴¹

At least one scholar bases his deletion of the word on the canonical Greek version (2 Esdras).¹⁴² However, the Greek does not omit אֲדִין, but rather takes it as an *aphel* of *d-y-n* in the perfect (i.e., אֲדִין or אֲדִין instead of אֲדִין),¹⁴³ modified by כַּנְמָא: τὸ δὲ ἔκρινεν Ραουμ βααλταμ, “thus has judged Raoum (the) *baaltam*.”¹⁴⁴ Apparently, the Greek translators, too, were expecting a verb in this verse!

Our intuitive sense that the use of אֲדִין in 4:9 is anomalous is confirmed by an examination of the other occurrences of אֲדִין in Ezra and Daniel. All of them are part of a clause describing an event or state in the past or future. That is also the case in the Elephantine papyri; nevertheless, those papyri will provide an excellent parallel to the use of אֲדִין in 4:9, once we have clarified the nature of that use.

¹³⁷ Meyer, *Entstehung*, 27; Schaefer, *Iranische Beiträge*, 22; Wilhelm Rudolph, *Esra und Nehemia* (HAT; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1949), 36; and Antonius H. J. Gunneweg, *Esra* (KAT 19/1; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1985), 84.

¹³⁸ Meyer, *Entstehung*, 27 n. 1.

¹³⁹ Galling, “Kronzeugen,” 70 n. 16.

¹⁴⁰ Dieter Böhler, *Die heilige Stadt in Esdras α und Esra-Nehemia: Zwei Konzeptionen der Wiederherstellung Israels* (OBO 158; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 221, 225.

¹⁴¹ Williamson, *Ezra*, 54. Williamson’s solution was proposed earlier by Koopmans, “Het eerste Aramese gedeelte,” 153; and Chapira, *Ezra*, 42.

¹⁴² Frank Michaeli, *Les livres des Chroniques, d’Esdras et de Néhémie* (CAT 16; Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1967), 269 n. 5.

¹⁴³ It is not impossible that such a form actually existed, alongside אֲדִין. Some speakers of Aramaic may have reanalyzed the form אֲדִין, a II-y *qal* imperfect whose perfect is אֲדִין, as an *aphel* verb, whose perfect is אֲדִין. There are many parallels in Hebrew. For example, the *qal* imperfect אֲשַׁיַּי was reanalyzed as a *hiphil*, whose perfect is אֲשַׁיַּי (cf. Ezek 14:8 and Job 4:20).

¹⁴⁴ See already Meyer, *Entstehung*, 27 n. 1.

As is well known, אֲדִין (< Old Aramaic אֲדִי) is the Aramaic cognate of Hebrew אֲדָן (< archaic אֲדִי).¹⁴⁵ In 1934, James A. Montgomery argued that אֲדָן is “a widespread archival expression belonging to the cosmopolitan language of official scribes.”¹⁴⁶ Tryggve N. D. Mettinger agreed that “archival material [in the Deuteronomistic Historical Work] is discernible not only through its special content but also through certain stylistic features like אֲדָן with the perfect. . . .”¹⁴⁷ According to Hayim Tadmor and Mordechai Cogan, אֲדָן and בֵּעַת הַהֵיא, “at that time,” are “formulae, which introduce quotations from earlier sources.”¹⁴⁸

Montgomery added that אֲדָן is a “stylistic adverb [that] appears to replace some definite date or circumstance in the original record, as Ewald long ago suggested (= *hoc anno*). . . .”¹⁴⁹ This view has been endorsed by Martin Noth and Menahem Haran.¹⁵⁰ So too Tadmor and Cogan: “The author [of 2 Kgs 16:5–6] must have had at his disposal some archival material, i.e. original records from the royal chancelleries of Israel and Judah, which he appropriated for his composition, but, for some reason, he preferred general formulae to the exact dates of his original sources.”¹⁵¹

Tadmor and Cogan, following Montgomery, note that “this phenomenon was common in the Assyrian and Babylonian historical literature.”¹⁵² As an example, they cite the phrase *ina ūmišūma*, “at that time,” in the throne base inscription of Shalmaneser III, arguing that it introduces a quotation from a chronistic source: “At that time, Adad-idri, the Damascene, Irhulini from Hamath and 12 kings of the sea coast, trusted in their own strength and made war against me.”¹⁵³ This is indeed similar to the use of אֲדָן in, say, אֲזַ יַעֲלֵה חֲזָאֵל מֶלֶךְ אַרְם וַיִּלְחֶם עַל גַּת וַיִּלְכְּדָהּ, “then King Hazael of Aram came up and attacked Gath and captured it” (2 Kgs 12:18), and אֲזַ יַעֲלֵה רִצִּין מֶלֶךְ אַרְם וּפְקַח בֶּן רַמְלִיָּהוּ מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל יְרוּשָׁלַם לְמַלְחָמָה, “then King Rezin of Aram and King Pekah son of Remaliah of Israel came up to Jerusalem for battle” (2 Kgs 16:5). One could also point to the use of *enūma*, “then,” in Akkadian royal inscriptions down to the Neo-Babylonian period, e.g., *enūma ekalla . . . ēpušma*

¹⁴⁵ Archaic אֲדִי is vocalized אֲדִי and אֲדִי in the Babylonian reading tradition (I. Yeivin, *The Hebrew Language Tradition as Reflected in the Babylonian Vocalization* [in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Academy of the Hebrew Language, 1985], 903), bringing it even closer to אֲדִי; cf. also Arab. *ʿidā*.

¹⁴⁶ James A. Montgomery, “Archival Data in the Book of Kings,” *JBL* 53 (1934): 49.

¹⁴⁷ Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *Solomonic State Officials: A Study of the Civil Government Officials of the Israelite Monarchy* (ConBOT 5; Lund: Gleerup, 1971), 36.

¹⁴⁸ Hayim Tadmor and Mordechai Cogan, “Ahaz and Tiglath-Pileser in the Book of Kings: Historiographic Considerations,” *Bib* 60 (1979): 494. I am indebted to Barry L. Eichler for this reference.

¹⁴⁹ Montgomery, “Archival Data,” 49.

¹⁵⁰ Martin Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1957), 70 n. 1; Menahem Haran, “Between Royal Annals and Literary Sources: The Books of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah and Israel—What Were They?” (in Hebrew), *ErIsr* 26 (1999; Festschrift F. M. Cross): 45.

¹⁵¹ Tadmor and Cogan, “Ahaz,” 494.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 495.

“then I built a palace” (Nebuchadnezzar).¹⁵⁴ It appears that substitution of “then” for an original date was not uncommon when archival records were quoted in literary works.

At first glance, this does not seem to help with our problem. In all of the above examples, “then” modifies the following clause—unlike אָדִין in 4:9. However, now that we know that אָדִין may be a substitute for a date,¹⁵⁵ we can broaden our search for parallels.

One close parallel to Ezra 4:9–11a is the heading of *TAD* C3.15 Cowley 22, the collection account from Elephantine discussed above: ב-3 לפמנחתף שנת 5 זנה. “On the third of Phamenoth, year 5. This is (a record of) the names of the Jewish garrison which gave money. . . .” Here the date is a sentence fragment, like the dates on modern documents. Syntactically, it is a temporal adverbial, but it does not modify the following clause. If anything, it modifies an understood clause, such as *כתיב זכרנא זנה, “this record was written.”¹⁵⁶

Another close parallel to Ezra 4:9–11a is the heading of a court officer’s report, quoted in the inscription of Mes: “Year 59 under the Majesty of King Horemheb. Copy of the examination which the priest [of the litter], Iniy, who was a Qenbet-officer, [made of] the Hunpet of the overseer of vessels Neshi, [which is in] the Uahit of Neshi.”¹⁵⁷

How do the headings of the collection account and the court officer’s report compare to Ezra 4:9–11a? In the biblical heading, we seem to have three main components: (1) a temporal adverbial: אָדִין, “then”; (2) a noun phrase giving the names of the principal actors: רחום בעל טעם ושמי שפרא ושאר כנותהון וגו; (3) a sentence beginning “this is the . . .” which identifies the text that follows in relation to the principal actors: דנה פרשגן אגרתא די שלחו עלוהי. Read together, (2) and (3) form a *casus pendens* construction, as we have already noted.¹⁵⁸

Use of the *casus pendens* construction was a virtual necessity here owing to the unusual length and complexity of the subject of the relative clause modifying אגרתא.¹⁵⁹ When we strip away the *casus pendens* construction, we are left with the following underlying sentence:

¹⁵⁴ *CAD* 7:158–59, s.v. *inūma*.

¹⁵⁵ In contracts from Elephantine, אָדִין does not actually *replace* the date, but it does *recapitulate* it. In a dozen cases, אָדִין comes immediately after the opening date, acting as a kind of resumptive adverb, e.g., ב-12 לתחות שנת 4 ארתחשש מלכא אדִין אמר ענני, “on the twelfth of Thoth, year 4 of King Artaxerxes, then said Anani . . .” (*TAD* B3.12 Kraeling 12, line 1). Such recapitulation is only one step away from total replacement. The redundancy of this construction was an invitation to later copyists to save time by deleting the date and leaving אָדִין. (On abbreviation by copyists, see Appendix 2 below.) It is unclear whether the use of אָדִין in 4:9 is to be attributed to copyists or the biblical author.

¹⁵⁶ See *TAD* A3.9 Kraeling 13, line 8: [א] ב-5 לאפף כתיב אגרתא ז[א], “on the fifth of Epiph this letter was written.”

¹⁵⁷ Gardiner, *Inscription of Mes*, 11.

¹⁵⁸ See at n. 128 above.

¹⁵⁹ In long register-rolls containing many documents, there is perhaps another reason for pre-

אדין, דנה פרשגן אגרתא
 די שלח רחום בעל טעם ושמי שפרא ושאר כנותהון
 דיניא ואפרסתכיא טרפליא אפרסיא ארכוי בבליא
 שושנכיא דהוא עלמיא ושאר אמיא
 די הגלי אסנפר רבא ויקירא והותב המו בקרייה
 די שמרין ושאר עבר נהרה
 על ארתחששתא מלכא.

Clearly, the underlying sentence is very clumsy and difficult to comprehend, and we can easily understand why it was transformed into a *casus pendens* construction. For our purposes, however, the underlying structure is superior because it is more easily compared with the headings of the collection account and the court officer's report.

Comparing the three headings, we find that “this is (a record of) the names of the Jewish garrison which . . .” and “copy of the examination which . . .” match “this is a copy of the letter which. . .” Further, the dates “on the third of Phamenoth, year 5” and “year 59 under the Majesty of King Horemheb” correspond to “then”; the latter must have been substituted at some point for a date. If so, the use of אדין in 4:9 is no longer a problem. It does not modify the following clause, because it replaces a date that also did not modify the following clause.

X. THE ORIGIN OF THE OTHER INTRODUCTIONS AND THE NARRATIVE MATERIAL

Our analysis has focused mainly on the various introductions in Ezra 4:7–11, all of which precede the letter of Rehum and Shimshai. Before concluding, we must say a word about the origin of the other introductions and the narrative material. We begin with the introductions to the letters of Artaxerxes and Tattenai:

פתגמא שלח מלכא על רחום בעל טעם ושמי שפרא ושאר כנותהון די
 יתבין בשמרין ושאר עבר נהרה שלם וכעת:

פרשגן אגרתא די שלח תתני פחת עבר נהרה ושתר בוזני וכנותה
 אפרסכיא די בעבר נהרה על דריוש מלכא: פתגמא שלחו עלוהי וכדנה
 כתיב בגוה לדריוש מלכא שלמא כלא:

ferring the *casus pendens* construction. In a collection of letters following Meyer's format, every document would have a heading beginning שלח אגרתא די פרשגן. An official searching for a specific letter would have to skip the first four words of every heading to find information helpful in locating the specific letter he was looking for. The *casus pendens* construction makes searches more efficient by extracting the subject of the relative clause and placing it at the beginning of the heading.

Were these introductions written by Bishlam and his colleagues (level II in the diagram of 4:7–11 above) or do they go back to the original archival register-rolls (level III)? Much depends on how we account for the similarity between פתגמא שלח (4:17) and פתגמא שלחו (5:7). It is certainly possible to argue that this expression was used in archival headings in the time of Artaxerxes I as well as the time of Darius I, but it seems simpler to attribute it to a single group of writers. In other words, the phrase פתגמא שלח (ו), common to the two sets of correspondence, appears to originate with the officials who prepared the report for Artaxerxes.

What of the Aramaic narrative material (4:23–5:5; 6:1–2, 13–18)? As noted by Williamson, much of that material probably comes from the biblical author.¹⁶⁰ However, a different origin may be proposed for 4:23 (“Then, as soon as King Artaxerxes’ letter had been read to Rehum and Shimshai the scribe and their colleagues, they hurried to Jerusalem, to the Jews, and stopped them by force”) and 6:13 (“Then Tattenai, governor of Across-the-River, Shethar-bozenai and their colleagues—as King Darius wrote, so they did diligently”). These verses have the appearance of brief “memoranda of action taken” stemming either from the archival register-rolls or from notations added to the royal letters themselves by the recipients.

Before discussing 4:24, we need to give some background. The biblical author, as evidenced by 6:14 (“by the decree of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes”),¹⁶¹ was fully aware of the correct order of the Persian kings and the reverse chronological ordering within his Aramaic source.¹⁶² He was consequently faced with an unusually difficult literary problem: how does one insert such a document into a chronologically ordered narrative? He hit upon a solution of extraordinary ingenuity. First, he created a digression about attempts to thwart Jewish plans for reconstruction. He began the digression in 4:4–5: “Thereupon, the people of the land weakened the resolve of the people of Judah and made them afraid to build and bribed counselors to thwart their plans all the days of King Cyrus of Persia and until the reign of King Darius of Persia.” In 4:6 he transformed the digression into a flashforward: “And in the reign of Xerxes, at the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the residents of Judah and Jerusalem.” In 4:7, he extended the flashforward into the reign of Artaxerxes by inserting a reference to the archival search report followed by the first half of the report itself, viz., the Artaxerxes correspondence.¹⁶³ Then, in 4:24, he inserted a resumptive repetition to signal the end of the flashforward, thereby bringing us back to the events of Darius’s second year and the Darius correspondence.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ Williamson, *Ezra*, 73–74.

¹⁶¹ The reference to Artaxerxes anticipates 7:20, 27. For the author’s use of the flashforward technique, see below.

¹⁶² Williamson, *Ezra*, 58; Glatt, *Chronological Displacement*, 125.

¹⁶³ Williamson, *Ezra*, 57; Halpern, “Historiographic Commentary,” 108.

¹⁶⁴ Keil, *Ezra*, 74–75; S. Talmon, “Ezra and Nehemiah (Books and Men),” *IDBSup*, 322; Williamson, *Ezra*, 57; Blenkinsopp, *Ezra*, 111, 115; Halpern, “Historiographic Commentary,” 110; Glatt, *Chronological Displacement*, 125.

The author's solution is a true tour de force, but it is impossible to appreciate without an understanding of the problem it was intended to solve. H. H. Rowley could see no logic in the placement of the Aramaic letters: "It is hard to see why the Chronicler should interrupt his account of the Temple to insert a long subsequent incident."¹⁶⁵ So too Lester L. Grabbe: "If these *are* archive sources used by the author of Ezra, why are they not inserted in the appropriate place in his Hebrew narrative?"¹⁶⁶ In short, the technique employed by the biblical author proved too subtle for most subsequent readers,¹⁶⁷ who made the natural assumption that the author believed he was giving the letters in chronological order. That assumption is implicit already in Josephus's *Antiquities* (11.2.1 §21 and 11.2.2 §26, where Artaxerxes is transformed into Cambyses, Darius's predecessor), and it is still far too common today.

XI. CONCLUSIONS

Almost fifty years ago, Shemaryahu Talmon wrote: "At least some of these documents [in Ezra 4:8–6:12] must have come from the Persian state archives by ways which can no longer be ascertained."¹⁶⁸ I have tried to show that two of the most puzzling features of these documents—multiple introductions and reverse chronological order—are actually clues that can help us to trace the route by which they reached the biblical author-historian.

The clues suggest that the source of the four Aramaic letters in Ezra 4–6 was a report sent to Artaxerxes I by Bishlam, Mithredath, and Tabeel giving the results of an archival search. Earlier in his reign, this king had decreed that the work on

¹⁶⁵ H. H. Rowley, "Nehemiah's Mission and Its Background," *BJRL* 37 (1954–55): 541, reprinted in Rowley, *Men of God: Studies in Old Testament History and Prophecy* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1963), 222. Cf. Halpern, "Historiographic Commentary," 108: "But why does the historian pursue relations with the neighbors down to Artaxerxes in 4:6–23, when the issue is obstruction in Darius's time?"

¹⁶⁶ Lester L. Grabbe, "Reconstructing History from the Book of Ezra," in *Second Temple Studies*, vol. 1, *Persian Period* (ed. P. R. Davies; JSOTSup 117; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 101. See also Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 134: "But then comes the real jaw-dropper: the letter from Artaxerxes is used to stop the building of the temple in the time of Cyrus and to keep it halted until the reign of Darius! Artaxerxes was at least sixty years later. This is like reading that the Charge of the Light Brigade in the Crimean War was devastated by machine gun fire from aeroplanes. The author of the narrative clearly has not the faintest idea of the relationship of the Persian kings to one another, and has placed his documents to produce what in his opinion is the best argument without being aware that it makes nonsense of Persian history."

¹⁶⁷ This despite the fact that the use of resumptive repetition in the Bible has been recognized for at least a thousand years; see Shemaryahu Talmon, "The Presentation of Synchronicity and Simultaneity in Biblical Narrative," *ScrHier* 27 (1978): 12–17; and Richard C. Steiner, "A Jewish Theory of Biblical Redaction from Byzantium: Its Rabbinic Roots, Its Diffusion and Its Encounter with the Muslim Doctrine of Falsification," *Jewish Studies, an Internet Journal* 2 (2003): 143–44. I am indebted to Barry L. Eichler for the former reference.

¹⁶⁸ Talmon, "Ezra and Nehemiah," 321.

Jerusalem's wall be suspended "until I give the order" (4:21). Before issuing that decree, he had ordered a search of the archives (4:19), and it appears that another search was necessary before a new decree could be issued allowing the work to resume under Nehemiah's leadership.

In carrying out the new search, Bishlam and his fellow archivists first looked for—and found—the Artaxerxes correspondence that had led to the suspension of the reconstruction project. After those letters were copied onto a scroll, the earlier, less-relevant, Darius correspondence turned up and was copied onto the same scroll, in reverse chronological order. The first of these extracts from the archival register-rolls already had a heading, but the archivists felt the need to add their own heading to it. Thus, the first extract wound up with two headings in the report sent to the king. The biblical author's cryptic description of the archivists' letter (גשׁתון) as containing a document (כתב) "written in Aramaic and translated into Aramaic" turns out to be perfectly accurate: one of the four letters in the report was written (i.e., composed) in Aramaic from the outset, while at least two of the others were translated into Aramaic from Old Persian.

The biblical author decided to retain the reverse chronological order of the report, even though it clashed with his chronologically ordered narrative. He attempted to resolve the clash by making the Artaxerxes correspondence part of a flashforward and inserting a resumptive repetition (plus narrative) before the Darius correspondence. However, his highly ingenious solution has proved to be too subtle for readers from Josephus to the present day.

Although Nehemiah's role in the commissioning of the archival search is unclear, it is likely that the report cleared the way for his mission. It seems that he brought a copy of the report with him to Jerusalem, for 2 Macc 2:13 tells us that he had a βιβλιοθήκη containing "letters of kings concerning votive offerings." This is generally understood to be a reference to two royal letters, Darius's letter to Tattenai and Artaxerxes' letter to Ezra, both of which deal with votive offerings (Ezra 6:9 and 7:22). Avigad's discovery of bullae from the archive of another governor of Judah makes it quite likely that Nehemiah, too, had an archive.

Our theory, then, is that the Aramaic letters in Ezra 4–6 were part of an archival search report that originated in Bishlam's archive and ended up in Nehemiah's archive. The latter archive would also have contained Nehemiah's official day-book, which probably formed the basis of his memoirs. Thus, our tale of two archives goes a long way toward explaining the origin of the book of Ezra-Nehemiah.

APPENDIX 1

The Peoples Exiled by Ashurbanipal

According to 2 Esdras and the Masoretic vocalization of דִּינִיָּא וְאַפְרִסְתְּכִיָּא (דְּהוּא) עֲלֵמִיָּא טְרַפְלֵיָּא אַפְרָסִיָּא אַרְכָּוִי בְּבִלְיָא שׁוּשַׁנְכִיָּא דְּהִיָּא (Ezra 4:9), all of these

terms are ethnonyms, presumably referring to the “peoples whom the great and glorious Asenappar¹⁶⁹ deported and settled in the cities¹⁷⁰ of Samaria and the rest of Across-the-River” (4:10). Asenappar has long been identified with Ashurbanipal, and many of the ethnonyms on the list can be identified with the inhabitants of countries and cities that rebelled against Ashurbanipal and were subdued by him. In this appendix, I wish to discuss only those ethnonyms; in AV they appear as Dinaites, Apharsites, Babylonians, Susanchites, Dehavites, and Elamites.

Babylonians, Susanchites, Elamites

We need not dwell on these names. It is well known that Elam assisted Babylonia in the great revolt against Ashurbanipal.¹⁷¹ In 648–645 Ashurbanipal reconquered Babylon after a long siege and decimated Elam and its capital, Susa.¹⁷² His annals say nothing about deportations to Samaria, but they do mention the deportation of Elamites from Kirbit to Egypt.¹⁷³

Dinaites

Most modern scholars take דִּינַיִם to mean “judges” and emend the pointing accordingly. However, a better interpretation was suggested in 1882 by Friedrich Delitzsch: “Perhaps one may compare the city *Dîn-šarru* . . . near Susa.”¹⁷⁴ This identification is virtually unknown today; even those few scholars who still take דִּינַיִם as an ethnonym do not mention it.¹⁷⁵

One reason for this unjustified neglect is that, even though Delitzsch correctly identified Asenappar with Ashurbanipal,¹⁷⁶ he neglected to mention that he drew his information about Din-šarri from an inscription of that very king, the Rassam

¹⁶⁹ For this transliteration of the name, note the *ga^cya* in גַּאֲיָא found in the editions of Mordechai Breuer published by Mossad Harav Kook (Jerusalem, 1989) and Horev (Jerusalem, 1997?). Cf. Ασενναφάρ in 2 Esdras.

¹⁷⁰ The word קרייה here is a determined mass noun (“collective”), like the Syriac word used to render it in the Peshitta and like שְׂנֵא; see the discussion in Torrey, *Ezra Studies*, 186, especially the reference to 2 Kgs 17:24, 26.

¹⁷¹ J. A. Brinkman, *Prelude to Empire: Babylonian Society and Politics, 747–626 B.C.* (Occasional Publications of the Babylonian Fund 7; Philadelphia: University Museum, 1984), 93–104.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 99–103.

¹⁷³ Bustenay Oded, *Mass Deportations and Deportees in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1979), 28.

¹⁷⁴ “Glossae Babylonicae Friderici Delitzschii” in S. Baer, *Libri Danielis Ezrae et Nehemiae* (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1882), X.

¹⁷⁵ See Gunneweg, *Ezra*, 82; see also p. 84; Dirk Schwiderski, *Handbuch des nordwestsemitischen Briefformulars: Ein Beitrag zur Echtheitsfrage der aramäischen Briefe des Esrabuches* (BZAW 295; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 348 n. 26: “The geographical association of the otherwise unattested word remains, however, problematic.”

¹⁷⁶ “Glossae Babylonicae,” VII–IX.

cylinder (V, 84–85).¹⁷⁷ He also neglected to mention that captives from Din-šarri were brought to Ashurbanipal in the city of Ashur, an event considered important enough to be commemorated in a relief in his palace.¹⁷⁸ It cannot be assumed that Ashur was their final destination, since “not all of the captives who were brought to the Assyrian capitals immediately after the campaign were settled there.”¹⁷⁹

It is in no way surprising that the compound toponym Din-šarri would yield an Aramaic ethnonym like דִּינִי.¹⁸⁰ Indeed, it is even possible that the toponym itself was abbreviated in Aramaic to דִּינָא*. The latter would be comparable to the toponym דִּוּרָא (in Dan 3:1 and elsewhere in Aramaic), which seems to be shortened from *Dūr šarri*, “fortress of the king,” or one of the many other Akkadian toponyms of the form *Dūr RN/DN*, “fortress of RN/DN.”¹⁸¹ Such an abbreviation of Din-šarri would have been favored by the fact that any *x* of the king is *the x* par excellence.

Dehavites

The form דְּהוּא is only a *ketiv*; the *qere* is דְּהוּאִי. Most modern scholars vocalize the *ketiv* as דְּהוּאִי following the rendering οἱ εἰσιν, “which are,” in Codex Vaticanus (2 Esdras). However, this interpretation is orthographically and grammatically problematic. There are no other examples in Biblical Aramaic of *dī* written without a *yod*,¹⁸² and singular דְּהוּא does not agree with its alleged plural antecedent, שׁוֹשְׁנֵיכִי.

It would be better to vocalize the *ketiv* as דְּהוּאִי (cf. דְּהוּאִי) based on δαυαοι in Codex Alexandrinus; this would point to an ethnonym of the form **Dahav-*, **Dahev-*, or the like. (AV’s *Dehavites* has *e* in the first syllable, but the *segol* in דְּהוּאִי.)

¹⁷⁷ See Maximilian Streck, *Assurbanipal und die letzten assyrischen Könige bis zum Untergange Ninivehs* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1916), 2:48–49. See also Eckhard Unger, “Din-Šarri,” *RIA* (1932–), 2:228; Walther Hinz and Heidemarie Koch, *Elamisches Wörterbuch* (Berlin: D. Reimer, 1987), 327; François Vallat, *Les noms géographiques des sources suso-élamites* (Repertoire Géographique des Textes Cunéiformes 11; Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1993), 57. In the Rassam cylinder, Din-šarri is mentioned immediately after Susa, while in the heading of Rehum’s letter, the Dinaites are separated from the Susanchites. The author of the heading had no reason to be aware of Elamite geography.

¹⁷⁸ Streck, *Assurbanipal*, 2:318–21.

¹⁷⁹ Oded, *Mass Deportations*, 28 n. 54.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. *Angeleno* for a resident of Los Angeles and Arabic gentilics like *bağawī* < *Bağšūr* and *ʿadārī* / *ʿadārbi* < *ʿAḏarbayjān* (W. Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language* [3rd ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967], 1:153D). *ʿAḏarbayjān* (Azerbaijan) derives from the Greek name of one of Alexander’s generals.

¹⁸¹ See H. O. Thompson, “Dura,” *ABD* 2:241. Cf. American abbreviations like Frisco for San Francisco and Jersey for New Jersey.

¹⁸² *BHS* and *HALAT*, 1690, read דְּהוּאִי with Vaticanus and a few manuscripts of MT, no doubt the ones cited in *Vetus Testamentum Hebraicum, cum variis lectionibus* (ed. B. Kennicott; Oxford: Clarendon, 1776–80), 2:609. However, these are late manuscripts in which the scribe, influenced by postbiblical orthography, has inadvertently inserted a *yod* as a *mater* for the *e* vowel. *HALAT* compares an alleged Egyptian Aramaic form דְּהוּא inscribed in Wadi Hammamat, but these letters are part of an abecedarium; see *TAD* D22.28.

like the one in *הַהָרִים*, derives from **a*.) Yonatan Miller, in a seminar paper written for me, suggests that the Dahavites are the people of Daeba. Daeba appears in the Rassam cylinder (V, 44) in a list of Elamite cities whose inhabitants Ashurbanipal deported initially to Assyria.¹⁸³ This identification may well be correct, for the Neo-Assyrian *b*-signs were sometimes used to represent native [w] and to render foreign (Iranian) [v].¹⁸⁴

Apharsites

The term *אפרסיה* is taken by some as referring to the Sipparites. Sippar was one of the four cities besieged by Ashurbanipal beginning in 650, along with Babylon, Borsippa, and Cutha.¹⁸⁵ More commonly, the term is taken as referring to the Persians. The connection of the latter with Ashurbanipal has been clarified by A. Malamat:

In two new passages from documents of Ashurbanipal, one published by Thompson and the other by Weidner, there is mention of Cyrus, King of Parsemash (whose inhabitants were Persians), and rulers from other lands; “Kings whose home is distant and who dwell on the far-off border of Elam.” The date of these documents and especially of the second passage, which tells that Cyrus I capitulated to the Assyrians after the final destruction of Elam, was justly fixed by the publishers in the year 640–639. In any case, the mention of the Persians in connection with the abortive revolt of Elam is an interesting fact *per se*. To the writer’s knowledge, its parallelism with the list of exiled nations in the time of Asenappar has yet to be pointed out.¹⁸⁶

APPENDIX 2

Schwiderski’s Arguments against the Authenticity of the Aramaic Letters in Ezra 4–6

The debate over the Aramaic letters in Ezra 4–6 continues to the present day. The most recent major study to date them to the Hellenistic period is that of Dirk

¹⁸³ Streck, *Assurbanipal*, 2:46–47. Dun-šarri, viewed by Streck as a variant of Din-šarri, also appears in this list.

¹⁸⁴ See Stephen A. Kaufman, *The Akkadian Influences on Aramaic* (Assyriological Studies 19; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 143 (cited by Miller); and Ran Zadok, *The Ethnolinguistic Character of Northwestern Iran and Kurdistan in the Neo-Assyrian Period* (Jaffa, Israel: Archaeological Center, 2002), 52–53 §4.12. For labial fricatives in Elamite, see Margaret Khačikjan, *The Elamite Language* (Rome: Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, 1998), 8.

¹⁸⁵ Brinkman, *Prelude*, 97.

¹⁸⁶ A. Malamat, “The Historical Background of the Assassination of Amon, King of Judah,” *IEJ* 3 (1953): 28–29

Schwiderski.¹⁸⁷ The evidence presented by Schwiderski is stylistic. In his view, the letters depart in various respects from the epistolographic conventions of the Achaemenid period. Most of these departures involve the omission of formulaic material at the beginning of the letter.

In my view, such evidence cannot be used to date these letters. The epistolographic conventions of the Achaemenid period are known almost exclusively from original documents. The letters in Ezra, on the other hand, are “copies of copies of ancient sources”;¹⁸⁸ they may well have been copied several times before they even reached the biblical author. Under such conditions, it would be rather surprising if all of the introductory formulae (names of sender and recipient, salutation, and the transition-marker וְכַעַת/וְכַעַן/וְכַעַת, “and now”) were preserved intact. In other words, it is precisely in the formulaic features studied by Schwiderski that comparison with original documents is least reliable. The letters in Ezra need to be compared with letters in Achaemenid archival registers or, better yet, with copies made from Achaemenid archival registers.

Documents of this precise type have not yet been found, but we have something close. The Jedaniah archive from Elephantine contains several letters *from* Jedaniah, indicating that they are either drafts or copies. Either way they were kept in the archive for future reference. Two of them have all of the standard formulaic features, but one of them (TAD A4.10 Cowley 33) has no address on the outside, omits the name of the addressee in the *praescriptio*, and lacks a salutation. This shows that formulaic features could be omitted in archival copies.

Further evidence may be adduced from Ras Shamra, where three Ugaritic letters addressed to the king of Egypt and one to the Hittite emperor have been found. According to Dennis Pardee, “the documents . . . are perforce drafts of some kind, whether for translation, for a final Ug. text, for a letter that was in fact never sent, or for an archival copy.”¹⁸⁹ Concerning the letter to the Hittite emperor, Pardee writes: “This appears . . . to be—as expected—a draft in which the *praescriptio* was either omitted or abbreviated.”¹⁹⁰ One of the three letters to the Egyptian king is a draft with two addresses, both abbreviated.¹⁹¹ Another “begins *in medias res* and is, therefore, either the second tablet of a longer letter or else the draft of a letter for which the opening formulae were considered unnecessary.”¹⁹²

The claim that the Aramaic letters in Ezra 4–6 are abridged is far from new. Concerning Tattenai’s letter, Meyer writes: “Here, then, the letter’s introduction is abbreviated in the severest way possible. . . .”¹⁹³ In discussing a more substantive

¹⁸⁷ Schwiderski, *Handbuch*, 375–82.

¹⁸⁸ Millard, “Aramaic Documents,” 237.

¹⁸⁹ Dennis Pardee, “Outgoing Correspondence to Other Courts,” in *COS* 3:98 n. 77.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 100 n. 92.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 99 n. 85.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 99 n. 87.

¹⁹³ Meyer, *Entstehung*, 27.

omission in the letter, he suggests: “Perhaps it was viewed as irrelevant and omitted already by the copyist of the Jerusalem exemplar.”¹⁹⁴ In the view of Aage Bentzen, “it can well be a copyist’s practice to omit all fixed formulas of epistolographic style.”¹⁹⁵ More recent scholars have tended to attribute the omission to the biblical writer. According to P. S. Alexander,

the way in which these letters are quoted often obscures their formal aspects: in some cases we cannot be sure if the letters are complete; in others it is impossible to tell what opening conventions they reflect, since part of their openings may have been absorbed into the narrative framework (see, e.g., Ezra iv. 17–22).¹⁹⁶

Porten takes a similar approach:

Incorporating official letters into a narrative, however, the editor-author of Ezra adapted them in at least one respect to the needs of storytelling—he abridged the opening address. In truth, he was more conservative in his treatment of the sources than his Hebrew forerunners. In every instance where the Hebrew narrator quoted a letter, he eliminated the address and salutation entirely. . . . Not even in the associated book of Nehemiah did the editor bother with the introductory formula when quoting from a letter (6:6f).¹⁹⁷

So too Williamson: “A strict form-critical analysis of the two letters which have been at least partially transcribed (vv 8–16, 17–22) is hampered by the fact that we cannot now be sure to what extent the author may have introduced slight changes in order to work the letters into a more satisfactory narrative style.”¹⁹⁸ De Vaux goes further, adducing such abbreviation as evidence of authenticity:

Darius’ reply to the governor, Tattenai, would naturally have begun with the usual address and formulas, but they are omitted here, which is something a forger would have been careful not to do. The historian Josephus, who understood nothing of this section of Ezra and who confused the two edicts and inserted apocryphal letters of Cyrus and Darius, never failed to attach to his documents, whether true or invented, an introduction couched in appropriate terms.¹⁹⁹

Despite the prevalence of such claims, Schwiderski fails to address them. Take, for example, the *praescriptio* of Rehum’s letter: *על ארתחששתא מלכא עבדיך אנש*, “to King Artaxerxes, (from) your servants, the men of Across-the-River.” It has long been recognized that there are very close parallels in Official Aramaic letters, e.g., *אל מראן בגוהי פחת יהוד עבדיך ידניה וכנותה*, “to our lord Bagohi gover-

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁹⁵ Aage Bentzen, “De aramaiske Dokumenter i Ezra—nogle Bemærkninger,” *Teologisk Tidsskrift for den Danske Folkekirke* 4 (1923): 113.

¹⁹⁶ P. S. Alexander, “Remarks on Aramaic Epistolography in the Persian Period,” *JSS* 23 (1978): 157.

¹⁹⁷ Porten, “Address Formulae,” 396–97.

¹⁹⁸ Williamson, *Ezra*, 59.

¹⁹⁹ De Vaux, *Bible*, 93.

nor of Judah, (from) your servants Jedaniah and his colleagues" (*TAD* A4.7 Cowley 30), and על מראי פסמי עבדך מכבנת "to my lord Psami, (from) your servant Makkibanit" (*TAD* A2.4 Bresciani-Kamil 3).²⁰⁰ Schwiderski concedes this similarity, as well as the similarity in the use of the transition-marker "and now." However, for him this similarity is not decisive, even though he cites no counterparallels from the Hellenistic period. He chooses to focus instead on the absence of two elements: (1) the names of the senders and, more important, (2) the salutation. In his view, the absence of a salutation is conclusive proof that the letter is not genuine.

Schwiderski makes no mention of Joseph A. Fitzmyer's conclusion that "the initial greeting of an addressee was sometimes omitted in Aramaic letters, especially in those which had an official or quasi-official character."²⁰¹ Nor does he mention the possibility that, in the course of the transmission of the letter, a long-winded salutation was deleted because of its excessive length. Most important of all, in discussing the omission of the salutation in Rehum's letter, he fails to compare the omission of the salutation in one of Jedaniah's archival copies (*TAD* A4.10 Cowley 33).²⁰² It is true that he views *TAD* A4.10 as a draft (*Entwurf*) rather than a copy,²⁰³ but, even if he is right, the fact remains that this was the only version of the letter preserved in the archive for future reference. Who is to say that the letter of Rehum and Shimshai in Ezra does not, likewise, go back to a draft deposited by them in the regional archive? Indeed, the Ugaritic evidence cited above suggests that it may have been standard practice in some places to keep drafts as archival copies.

Similar considerations apply to Artaxerxes' reply. According to Schwiderski, the letter begins: על רחום בעל טעם ושמשי ספרא ושאר כנותהון די יתבין בשמרין ושאר "to Rehum the commissioner and Shimshai the scribe and the rest of their colleagues who dwell in Samaria and the rest of Across-the-River, (greetings of) welfare, and now." Here again there are two unexpected features: the absence of the sender's name and the use of the salutation שלם. In Schwiderski's view, the salutation שלם is conclusive proof of lateness, for it "does not belong to the repertoire of Old and Imperial Aramaic letters, but rather is the standard salutation of epigraphic and literary texts of the Hellenistic-Roman period."²⁰⁴

Schwiderski's conclusion is difficult to reconcile with his recognition that one-word salutations appear already in the Achaemenid period on ostraca: שלמכי in *TAD* D7.5 and שלמך in D7.6.²⁰⁵ It is true that these salutations, meaning "your wel-

²⁰⁰ Porten, "Documents," 177.

²⁰¹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Aramaic Epistolography," in *A Wandering Aramean: Collected Aramaic Essays* (SBLMS 25; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), 183–204, here 191; originally published as "Some Notes on Aramaic Epistolography," *JBL* 93 (1974): 201–25, here 214.

²⁰² See above.

²⁰³ Schwiderski, *Handbuch*, 113–14.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 378.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 123.

fare,” appear to be abbreviations.²⁰⁶ After all, the scribe who wrote TAD D7.5 is believed to be the same scribe who wrote *שלמך יהה צבאת ישאל בכל עדן*, “Your welfare may Yaho of hosts seek after at all times,” in other ostraca.²⁰⁷ However, it is equally true that King Artaxerxes’ *שלם* appears to be an abbreviation of a salutation like the one often used by Prince Arsames (TAD A6.3 Driver 3, etc.): *שלם ושררת לך שגיאה הושרת לך*, “I send you abundant (greetings of) welfare and strength.”²⁰⁸ Since no Aramaic letters from the Persian kings have as yet been discovered, it is impossible to say whether the curt salutation of Artaxerxes’ reply reflects royal style or the abbreviation of a later copyist. The point is that if Achaemenid scribes could abbreviate a *שלם*-salutation to a single word in composing letters on ostraca (owing to lack of space), they could do the same in composing royal letters (as a reflection of the addressee’s inferior status) or in copying letters (owing to lack of time or lack of interest).²⁰⁹ There is no need to posit the influence of the Greek salutation *χαίρειν*, as Schwiderski does.

We conclude that Schwiderski’s methodology for dating the Aramaic letters in Ezra 4–6 is fatally flawed. The omission of formulaic material at the beginning of the letters is not a sign of lateness. As many scholars have seen, it is most naturally attributed to abridgment by scribes.

APPENDIX 3

The Literary History of TAD A4.9 Cowley 32

TAD A4.9 Cowley 32 is the product of a complex literary history. For one thing, the scribe who wrote it made several mistakes, which he subsequently corrected in various ways. Porten’s brief explanation of these corrections does not seem to fit his description of them.²¹⁰ I would, therefore, like to offer a different explanation.

The document begins as follows:

זכרן זי בגוהי ודליה אמרו¹
 לזי זכרן לם יהוי לך במצרין לממר²

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ See Paul-E. Dion, “La lettre araméenne passe-partout et ses sous-espèces,” *RB* 89 (1982): 535, and the references cited there.

²⁰⁸ See Porten, “Documents,” 177.

²⁰⁹ See Alexander, “Remarks,” 170: “the curt style of the ostraca may have sometimes been used in the papyri.”

²¹⁰ Porten, *Elephantine Papyri in English*, 148 n. 4 (= COS 3:130 n. 7): “Proofing his text, the scribe realized that the words of Bagavahya and Delaiah were not being said directly to Arsames but were to be recited ‘before’ him by the Jewish leaders.” This would seem to imply a correction from “to Arsames about” to “before Arsames about.” However, what we actually find according to Porten (in his next footnote) is a correction from “to me about.”

קדם ארשם על בית מדבחא זי אלה³
שמיא זי ביב בירתא בנה⁴

Porten translates:

- ¹Memorandum. What Bagothi and Delaiah said
²to me. Memorandum: Saying, Let it be for you in Egypt to say (ERASURE:
 bef)
³(ERASURE: to me about) before Arsames about the Altar-house of the God
 of (ERASURE: Heav)
⁴Heaven which in Elephantine the fortress built²¹¹

Grelot appears to follow Cowley in taking the first line of the text as a later addition.²¹² On the other hand, Porten argues, based on the spacing, that the *second* line is the later addition.²¹³ I suggest the following reconstruction, according to which both views are correct. TAD A4.9 Cowley 32 is not the original memorandum written by the messenger in the field (and later expanded by him) but an archival copy. Before the expansion, the original memorandum began as follows:

זכרן לם יהוי לך במצרין לממר קדם ארשם^{1.1}
 על בית מדבחא זי אלה שמיא זי ביב בירתא^{1.2}

The addition of an archival heading yielded:

זכרן זי בגוהי ודליה אמרו לי^{2.1}
 זכרן לם יהוי לך במצרין לממר קדם ארשם^{2.2}
 על בית מדבחא זי אלה שמיא זי ביב בירתא^{2.3}

From this expanded text, an archival copy was prepared with fewer words per line. The copyist initially made two mistakes: he omitted line 2.2 of the expanded original through an error of homoiocriton, and he inserted an extra על in the following line through dittography:

זכרן זי בגוהי ודליה אמרו^{3.1}
 לי על על בית מדבחא זי אלה^{3.2}
 שמיא זי ביב בירתא בנה^{3.3}

²¹¹ Porten, *Elephantine Papyri in English*, 148 = COS 3:130–31.

²¹² Grelot, *Documents*, 415. See above at n. 123.

²¹³ Bezalel Porten, "The Archive of Jedaniah Son of Gemariah of Elephantine—The Structure and Style of the Letters" (in Hebrew), *Erlsr* 14 (1978): 173–74; and idem, "A New Look: Aramaic Papyri & Parchments," *BA* 42 (1979): 99–100.

Subsequently, the scribe attempted to insert the omitted line 2.2 (together with the last word of 2.1) between lines 3.1 and 3.2, but the last two words, קדם ארשם, did not fit:

זכרן זי בגוהי ודליה אמרו^{4.1}
לי זכרן לם יהוי לך במצרין לממר קד^{4.2}
לי על על בית מדבחה זי אלה^{4.3}
שמיא זי ביב בירתא בנה^{4.4}

He erased the letters קד at the end of line 4.2 and wrote קדם in the right margin of line 4.3. He then erased the words על לי and wrote ארשם over them. The result was our present text, as transcribed above.