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

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

Then Rehum the commissioner and Shimshai the scribe and the rest of their colleagues, the Dinaities, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the Apharsites, the Archelites, the Babylonians, the Susanchites, the Dehavites, the Elamites, and the other peoples whom the great and glorious Assenappar deported and settled in the cities of Samaria and the rest of Across-the-River—and now, this 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 Galling called this “an old crux interpretum.” 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.

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 tell-tale 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:

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


3 Loring W. Batten, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1913), 166.
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. 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. 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 pihātāt Ebir Nāri, clearly identical to txp yntt hrhn rb(, whose letter (Ezra 5:6–17) is from year 2 of Darius (520 B.C.E.).

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.

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 hm# rcb##, “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.” In other words, it has what we may call

6 Better: pahat.
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 חכמה after the name of one’s own
a “de-definitizing” function, making proper names (which are inherently definite) indefinite or quasi-indefinite.

Meyer compared 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 construction. 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.” In 1995, M. L. Folmer wrote that “this use of šmh is not known from other Aramaic dialects, be it earlier or later . . . .” (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 .) During the past ten years,
another example of the construction has turned up, in an Aramaic ostracon from Idumea. It too is from the Achaemenid period (first half of the fifth century B.C.E.). With more than a century of hindsight, we may say that Meyer’s argument from the phrase הַמֶּה־רָכְבָּו has been confirmed beyond his wildest expectations.

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

Another phrase discussed by Meyer that subsequently turned up at Elephantine is בֵּל תֵמו (Ezra 4:8–9). Meyer observed that this administrative term was sometimes transliterated by the Greek translators (e.g., 1 Esdr 2:12 Ραουμως και Βεστλέους, as if the Aramaic text had had בֵּל תֵמו), indicating that it was no longer understood by them. 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 (בֵּל תֵמו 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 הַמֶּה־רָכְבָּו, governed by the preposition -ָו, is a noun phrase—not a clause. However, if הַמֶּה־רָכְבָּו means “this crag (or: mountain)—(is) its name” (with מֵתָא for מֵתָא, as Folmer (Aramaic Language, 684 n. 421) believes, then הַמֶּה־רָכְבָּו is not a noun phrase but a clause. Similarly, הַמֶּה־רָכְבָּו 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 sinh” (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.
18 Meyer, Entstehung, 33–34. 1 Esdras 2:13 has Ραουμως ο το προσπιπτωνα, and 2:19 has Ραουμως το γραφοντα το προσπιπτωνα και Βεστλέους.
Babylonian tablets, one from the time of Cyrus or Cambyses and the other from the time of Darius (486 B.C.E.). 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. After a thorough study of the Achaemenid Sitz im Leben of the term מ =>$\text{#rpm}$, "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. Some details of Schaeder's treatment of מ =>$\text{#rpm}$ have been challenged, but, in general, it has stood the test of time.

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)." De Vaux responded by pointing to the temple restoration projects of Cyrus in Babylonia and Darius in Egypt. 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-Kharga. Proof of Darius' building activity in Egypt is given by the inscriptions in the caves at Wadi Hammamatt; and blocks bearing his name have been found at El-Kab 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 Fayyum 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.

21 Schaeder, Iranische Beiträge, 14.
23 De Vaux, Bébé, 92–93.
Another important defense of the letters was published in 1978–79 by Bezalel Porten. 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 מִזְמַר:וּלָק כְּתִי הַנִּזָּה ("because of this we have sent (and) informed (you)"); it is virtually identical to the phrase מֵזִידַוְּלַכְתְּה הַנִּזָּה in the letter of Rehum and Shimshai (Ezra 4:14). In TAD A4.9 Cowley 32 lines 3–5, we have הבית המבנית והנני נזיחו הבית המבנית, "the altar-house . . . which in Elephantine the fortress was standing [lit., built] formerly, before (the time of) Cambyses"; it closely resembles the phrase הבית עד ההנה המבנית הכין משיא, "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: "to rebuild it in its place" (TAD A4.9 line 8), and הבנות על אנהוה, "shall be rebuilt on its place" (Ezra 5:15).

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. Today we know that there were royal and satrapal archives scattered throughout the Persian Empire.

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 Interpreters [ed. W. H. Propp et al.; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990], 88).
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, נבלי ים (Ezra 4:8–9), is a chancery term. The biblical author-historian’s introduction to Darius’s letter refers explicitly to a בית ירפס, “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 ירפס 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 *bibliothēkê*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 *bibliothēkê* 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 *bibliothēkê*, the *bibliothēkê 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...
memorandum concerning Mardochaios was stored. In the second Hanukkah letter at the beginning of 2 Maccabees (2:13), we find mention of a ΒΙΒΛΙΟΘΗΚΗ 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 ΒΙΒΛΙΟΘΗΚΗ contained not only "the books about the kings and the prophets and the books/writings of David" (τὰ περὶ τῶν βασιλέων βιβλίο καὶ προφητῶν καὶ τὰ τοῦ Δαυίδ) but also "letters of kings concerning votive offerings" (ἐπιστολὰς βασιλέων περὶ ἀναθημάτων).38 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 ΒΙΒΛΙΟΘΗΚΗ, 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 ΒΙΒΛΙΟΘΗΚΗ. 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.

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, ΜΑΓΟΣ, is equivalent to ἡγεμόν, “governor.” If ΜΑΓΟΣ 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.
41 The identity of the author is controversial. For a claim that it was Judas Maccabaeus 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. 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.

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. (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.

(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.” 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.
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 (ןכד תבוח יד בחר יד עבש), 4:19 (לכד לועש יד תבוח), and 5:16 (לכד תבוח יד עבש יד נבוב)—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” system\(^{53}\) 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.


\(^{53}\) 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 יבנדה יבנדה, "book of records" (Ezra 4:15), and its Hebrew counterpart, סופר יבנדה סופר יבנדה (Esth 6:1),\(^{57}\) may indicate that each book or scroll contained many records. The scroll found at Ecbatana containing a register 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:

iyor [ma] [iyor =] יי ויה [ם] יי יי "("[sh[ess of Ah[... which she/I gave into the hand of] 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: [sh[מת נמ[ת לא[ת, translated from יבנדה יבנדה, in which the old Hebrew term סופר יבנדה סופר יבנדה stands in apposition to the new term סופר יבנדה סופר יבנדה, translated from יבנדה יבנדה.


\(^{55}\) 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 synkollesimos (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 סופר יבנדה סופר יבנדה, translated from יבנדה יבנדה, in which the old Hebrew term סופר יבנדה סופר יבנדה stands in apposition to the new term סופר יבנדה סופר יבנדה, translated from יבנדה יבנדה.

\(^{58}\) Contrast סופר יבנדה סופר יבנדה (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 סופר יבנדה סופר יבנדה as a plural, that is, equivalent to יבנדה יבנדה יבנדה יבנדה יבנדה, "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.

“account of the grain which I wrote [and] gave to Ab(i)hi.” There is also a shorter type, without a classifying noun such as נְרָן, “record,” orccount, “account.” Thus, at the top of column 8, we have饲ֶרֶא בֶּרֶא נְרָן יִתְנָה יִתְנָה, “documents in the possession of Jonathan and me,” instead of דֶּבֶר נְרָן/הָבָר נְרָן, “account/record of the documents.” And in the Elephantine customs account (TAD C3.7 Aḥiqar Palimpsest), the subheadings have the form דֶּבֶר מִנְדָּה/מִשְׁם (אָסַּר) (י) רְבִי מִנְדָּה/מִשְׁם, “document of the tribute/tithe (et alia) which was collected from it/them and made over to the palace,” rather than דֶּבֶר/מוּדָּה/מִשְׁם, “account/record of the documents.” We shall shortly see evidence suggesting that, in headings lacking an explicit occurrence of a classifying noun, such a noun may have been understood.

The form of the headings cited above is very familiar. Like modern headings, they consist solely of a noun phrase. The noun phrase contains some or all of the following components: (1) a noun specifying the document type (letter, memorandum, account); (2) a noun specifying the subject of the document; (3) a relative clause, syndetic or asyndetic, modifying one of the previous nouns.60

Occasionally, we find a slightly fuller type of heading. Instead of a mere noun phrase, it is a complete sentence in which the subject is a demonstrative pronoun (this/these,” referring to the text that follows) and the predicate is a noun phrase like the headings described above. For example, in a collection account from Elephantine (TAD C3.15 Cowley 22), we have:הָיָה תַּמֵּר לְמִנְדָּה שְׁנֵה 5 וְהָמָהְתָּה וְלֵילָה וְהוֹדָאָה וְיִתְנָה מִסְפֵּר... H. L. Ginsberg translates: “On the 3rd of Phamenoth, year 5. This is (sic!) the names of the Jewish garrison which (sic!) gave money. . . .”61 Ginsberg’s first “sic!” calls attention to the lack of agreement between singular מִסְפֵּר and plural מִנְדָּה, “names.” This lack of agreement would seem to be evidence that a noun is to be understood, e.g., מִסְפֵּר מַמְשָׁת וְלֵילָה מִסְפֵּר מִסְפֵּר מִסְפֵּר מִסְפֵּר, “this is (a record of) the names of the Jewish garrison which gave money.” Cowley’s translation is similar: “this is (a list of) the names of the Jewish garrison who gave money. . . .”62 We may also note that the formatting of this heading differs from that of the subheadings cited above; it stretches across the top of two columns of writing.

Meyer argues that archival headings are preserved in Ezra. The clearest one is in Ezra 5:6:ןְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹנְכּוֹn, “copy of the letter that Tattenai, governor of Across-the-River, and Shethar-bozenai and his colleagues, the officials in Across-the-River, sent to King Darius.” In Meyer’s view, the presence of the Iranian loanword פְּרֵשֵׁי, “copy,” in this heading should be explained on the assumption that the latter is a

60 The same form is used in endorsements written on the back of contracts, e.g., יִתְנָה יִתְנָה יִתְנָה יִתְנָה יִתְנָה יִתְנָה יִתְנָה יִתְנָה יִתְנָה יִתְנָה יִתְנָה יִתְנָה יִתְנָה יִתְנָה יִתְנָה יִתְנָה יִתְנָה יִתְn, “document of withdrawal which Jedaniah wrote . . .” (TAD B2.10 Cowley 25), and יִתְנָה יִתְn, “document of wifehood which Ananiah wrote . . .” (TAD B3.8 Kraeling 15).


chancery notation (Kanzleivermerk) borne by the letter already in the Jerusalem archive. He conjectures that the letter of Rehum and Shimshai originally bore a similar chancery notation, something like **Mwxr xl# yd )nwt#n /trg) Ng#rp *klm ts#xtr) l,** but that its parts became detached and dislocated, leaving the passage in disarray.

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 [...]". A day-book of the King's House of Sobekhotpe III contains a rubric that begins "copy of the document." The inscription of Mes has a heading that begins with a date followed by "copy of the examination which . . . ." A Greek report from Tebtunis (115 C.E.) has four headings that begin with the words 'Antigrafon ejpistolh', "copy of letter."

Also relevant here is the word **hnwrkd,** "memorandum," at the end of Ezra 6:2. 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 Jedaniah archive (TAD A4.9 Cowley 32) begins with the heading "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," 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). . . .

64 Ibid., 26–28.
66 Ibid., 107.
67 See below.
68 See below.
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 נגראפ, “copy,” and נבשנה, “letter.” Accordingly, Porten prefers to seek the origin of Ezra 4:9–10 in an external address.72

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 כותב of Bishlam, Mithredath, and Tabeel (4:7) the same as the כותב 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: בֵּשְלֵמָן וּמִתְרוֹדָתָה וּתָבֵּלְלָא וּרְאוֹמוֹ וּמִתְרָלוֹ וּסָמְסָוָי וּגְרָמָלֵא. The Peshitta, on the other hand, signals a two-letter interpretation by adding the conjunction ו- 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-Tabeel.75 R. Isaiah of Trani, by contrast, adopts a two-letter position, commenting on מַעְרֹד מִיתֶרְדָּט וְתַבְּלֶל, 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 מַעְרֹד ותַבְּלֶל, but the waw cannot be correct, since this commentary, like other medieval commentaries, takes מַעְרֹד ותַבְּלֶל as the name of a single individual.
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. . . .

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 Aramaean composition of this letter would have been utterly purposeless if the Aramaean 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 Aramaean. This conjecture becomes a certainty through the fact that the Aramaean letter follows in ver. 8 without a copula of any kind. If any other had been intended, the t copulative would no more have been omitted here than in ver. 7. . . .

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

The problem in v. 7 becomes clearer when we compare it with v. 6:

78 Ibid., 64.
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 מְבִשַלְמ 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 השתותא of 4:7 is neither identical to the השתותא of 4:8–16 nor completely distinct from it. There is a third possibility: the השתותא 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.
84 Scholars have rightly compared וְהָשַׁתְותָה חָתָן אָרָמִי וְהָשַׁתְותָה גָּדוֹל אָרָמִי (Ezra 4:7b) with וְהָשַׁתְותָה חָתָן אָרָמִי וְהָשַׁתְותָה גָּדוֹל אָרָמִי (Dan 2:4a). Both are literary devices designed to prepare the reader for the change of language. Some scholars put a period before אָרָמִי 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 נְשֵׁתָה theory is not new. Seventy-five years ago, Schaedler wrote:

The fact that, contrary to what one would expect, the introduction to Tab'el'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 Tab'el's letter to another. The only admissible conclusion is rather that the petition of the two officials was included in Tab'el'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 Schaedler 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 נְשֵׁתָה 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 נְשֵׁתָה theory can and should be detached from the Klostermann-Schaedler 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 Arta-

85 Schaedler, Iranische Beiträge, 17.
87 Not Bishlam, Mithredath, and Tabeel. According to them, מָטַל מְתַרְדָּד 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 (βιβλιοφυλάκες) and a secretary (γραμματεύς; βιβλιοφυλάκιον), 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 βιβλιοφυλάκες, 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 (γαζοφυλάκιος) 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 γαζοφυλάκιος for an archivist is explained by Ezra 5:17, 6:1, where we learn that at Babylon the royal archives were in the treasury (αἰτήσεως τῆς γαζοφυλάκιον) of 1 Macc 1:48–49, where copies (ἐγγράφα) of a decree were deposited. Since γαζοφυλάκιος is just the Greek equivalent of עָבָד (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 עָבָד. 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.” 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. They copied them onto a new roll, which they sent to the king. 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: "בַּתָּן נֶעֱשׁאֲתָה בָּאוֹר אֵדְמוֹת מֵתוֹרָמְנָה אָרֶמִיתָה". The problems are obvious: נֶעֱשׁאֲתָה seems to be a pleonasm, a genitive phrase composed of two near synonyms; "בַּתָּן נֶעֱשׁאֲתָה" 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 "בַּתָּן נֶעֱשׁאֲתָה בָּאוֹר אֵדְמוֹת מֵתוֹרָמְנָה אָרֶמִיתָה".94

90 Cf. Blenkinsopp, Ezra, 115: "Unlike ‘the laws of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked’ (Dan. 6:8; cf. Esth. 8:9), 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: Butzön & Bercker, 1984), 182. In our case, no rhetorical function is apparent. According to Meyer (Entstehung, 18), הב is an old gloss to the Persian word יְשָׁוָה. Blenkinsopp (Ezra, 110), while agreeing with Meyer, confuses the issue by implying that הב can be a verb despite the vocalization with games: “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 לֵטֶר, “letter,” of Bishlam and his colleagues contains a הַמְּדוֹן, “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.”

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 Hanani arrived with Jews from Jerusalem (Neh 1:2) or before? In this connection, we may mention Schäder’s conjecture that Tabeel’s letter was delivered to Nehemiah by the Jews from Jerusalem before Nehemiah went in to see Artaxerxes.

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-like 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.

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

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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 Quirke, 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 Hanani. There are twelve to thirteen individuals named Ha-(ar-)na-ni- in the Murašu archive from Nippur (Artaxerxes I–Darius II); see Michael David Coogan, West Semitic Personal Names in the Murašu 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.


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 ψυχοθήκη.

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. It is clear that the Darius in question is Darius I 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?

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). 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.

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

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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.


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.”


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 Αντίγραφον ἐπιστολῆς, “copy of letter,” recalling מכתב in Ezra 5:6. Another has a heading that begins with the words Αντίγραφον ὑπομνηματισμῶν, “copy of memorandum/record,” reminiscent of the heading דבק 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 (βιβλιοθήκης 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 (βιβλιοθήκης) 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.
rolls was paid from the sequestrated 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."
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.
7. "Copy of letter." 103 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.


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.” 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. 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. 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 awk-
wardly, 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:

\[\text{Porten translates: "Memorandum. What Bagavaha and Delaiashaid to me. Memor-
orandum. Saying, 'Let it be for you in Egypt to say before Arsames. ..."}^{122}\] The rep-
etition of the word "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 intro-
duction in v. 8! See also Blenkinsopp, Ezra, 112.


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.”

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 Bagohi and Delaiah said to me.”

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:

"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. 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. יְיָ֣ם אָתְמ לָאֶמֶר
II. כַּכְּהַאֲמַרְתִּי לְעַלְשָּׁה
III. כַּכְּאֲמַר נַבְּדָךְ נֵעֲכָב
IV. טָם לָבָּן גֵרְתִּי אֵוָרְו דָּו הָעַה

There are three verbs of speaking here (אמרת, אמר, and אמר), each introducing the speech that begins one level below. The verb ייָם on level I belongs to the narrator's introduction; the verb אמר on level II belongs to Jacob's introduction; and the verb 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:

At first read-
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, "and strengthen it," seems either redundant (coming after "strengthen your attack") or incoherent (coming after "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:

As shown in the diagram, "and strengthen it" belongs not to level III but to level II, where it continues and refers to the strengthening (i.e., encouraging) 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:

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,

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 יודא. 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 תקנ, thereby detaching the words הדר פרשמיא אדרא אל שולחנעליעו 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 כמשתנים (Berlin: M. Poppelauer, 1899–1901), 2:408 lines 1–2. Keil's view is similar: “The verb to יודא is wanting; this follows in ver. 11, but as an anacoluthon, after an enumeration of the names in 9 and 10 with ימלא (Ezra, 65). We may compare the casus pendens construction in 6:13: )קלב ולכרקמ לודר ותריש המלכמ , "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, 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.

The second example, Prince Arsames’s boat repair authorization,\(^\text{130}\) 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.\(^\text{131}\) 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: ’Psamsineit[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 do].’”\(^\text{132}\)

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. Psamsineit[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 do.

In level I, Arsames introduces the report of a subordinate whose name is lost;\(^\text{133}\) in level II, the subordinate introduces Mithradates’ report; in level III, Mithradates introduces the report of Psamsineit and another boatholder; in level IV, we finally get to the heart of the matter: the report of Psamsineit 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 (Psamsineit 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).\(^\text{134}\)

IX. The Syntax of Dates and the Date-Substitute “Then”

It has frequently been noted that the use of the adverb נָדַע, “then,” at the beginning of 4:9 is highly problematic. Following נָדַע 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 "משאר תגר" to "והוא כמל תשב נזר חרב נזר חרב". The problem is not solved by taking that noun phrase as part of a casus pendent construction;\(^\text{135}\) נָדַע still seems out of place.\(^\text{136}\)

\(^{130}\) See also above.
\(^{132}\) Porten, Elephantine Papyri in English, 115–16.
\(^{133}\) Whitehead (Epistolography, 130) believes that the name is בֵּלא-..., 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 נָדַע in 6:13.
As a result, the word יד in this context has been labeled “senseless” (sinnlos) by many scholars, beginning with Meyer. Meyer conjectured that the verb בתק had fallen out following יד. A few scholars have followed him in retaining יד. One scholar writes that יד should not be changed because it is the lectio difficilior, and another believes that יד differentiates the letter of 4:9–16 from the one of 4:8. However, these are distinctly minority views; most of the solutions that have been proposed for the problems of these verses involve emending יד, transferring it elsewhere, or simply deleting it. Williamson writes:

The verse starts יד "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 קָנֵיה ”judges," and Rudolph emends it to קָנֵי יד "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 יד 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.

At least one scholar bases his deletion of the word on the canonical Greek version (2 Esdras). However, the Greek does not omit יד, but rather takes it as an aphel of י-י-נ in the perfect (i.e., יִדְּנָה or יִדְנָף instead of יִדְנַף), modified by נַבְעָט: תֹּאָבֵד קְרִנֵה בַּאֲלַתָמ, "thus has judged Raoum (the) baaltam." Apparently, the Greek translators, too, were expecting a verb in this verse!

Our intuitive sense that the use of יד in 4:9 is anomalous is confirmed by an examination of the other occurrences of יד 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 יד in 4:9, once we have clarified the nature of that use.

137 Meyer, Entstehung, 27; Schaeder, Iranische Beitänge, 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.


139 Galling, "Kronzeugen," 70 n. 16.

140 Dieter Böhler, Die heilige Stadt in Esdras a und Esra-Nehemia: Zwei Konzeptionen der Wiederherstellung Israels (OBO 158; Göttingen: Vandenhoed & 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.


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

144 See already Meyer, Entstehung, 27 n. 1.
As is well known, 'INN (< Old Aramaic 'NN) is the Aramaic cognate of Hebrew 'IN (< archaic 'IN).\textsuperscript{145} In 1934, James A. Montgomery argued that 'IN is "a widespread archival expression belonging to the cosmopolitan language of official scribes."\textsuperscript{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 'IN with the perfect. . . ."\textsuperscript{147} According to Hayim Tadmor and Mordechai Cogan, 'IN and 'IN, "at that time," are "formulae, which introduce quotations from earlier sources."\textsuperscript{148}

Montgomery added that 'IN is a "stylistic adverb [that] appears to replace some definite date or circumstance in the original record, as Ewald long ago suggested (\textit{= hoc anno}) . . . ."\textsuperscript{149} This view has been endorsed by Martin Noth and Menahem Haran.\textsuperscript{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 chancellories 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."\textsuperscript{151}

Tadmor and Cogan, following Montgomery, note that "this phenomenon was common in the Assyrian and Babylonian historical literature."\textsuperscript{152} As an example, they cite the phrase \textit{ina įmūšūma}, "at that time," in the throne base inscription of Shalmaneser III, arguing that it introduces a quotation from a chronic source: "At that time, Adad-idri, the Damascean, Irhulini from Hamath and 12 kings of the sea coast, trusted in their own strength and made war against me."\textsuperscript{153} This is indeed similar to the use of 'IN in, say, 'IN, 'N 'IN 'IN 'IN 'IN 'IN 'IN, "then King Hazael of Aram came up and attacked Gath and captured it" (2 Kgs 12:18), and 'IN 'IN 'IN 'IN 'IN 'IN 'IN, "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 \textit{enūma}, "then," in Akkadian royal inscriptions down to the Neo-Babylonian period, e.g., \textit{enūma ekalla . . . ēpušma . . . .}

\textsuperscript{145} Archaic 'NN is vocalized 'NN and 'IN in the Babylonian reading tradition (I. Yeivin, \textit{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 'NN; cf. also Arab. \textit{iḏā.}


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

\textsuperscript{149} Montgomery, "Archival Data," 49.

\textsuperscript{150} Martin Noth, \textit{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), \textit{ErIsr} 26 (1999; Festschrift F. M. Cross): 45.

\textsuperscript{151} Tadmor and Cogan, "Ahaz," 494.

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 495.
“then I built a palace” (Nebuchadnezzar). 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 in 4.9. However, now that we know that may be a substitute for a date, 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: . שָׁנָה ۵, “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 כְּתַבְתָּ הָדוֹד הָזָא, “this record was written.”

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.”

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: אֶלְעָד קָדָם, “then”; (2) a noun phrase giving the names of the principal actors: רַעְיָה יְהוֹעַד אֲרוֹם כְּתַבְתָּ הָדוֹד הָזָא; (3) a sentence beginning “this is the . . .” which identifies the text that follows in relation to the principal actors: שָׁנָה ۵. Read together, (2) and (3) form a casus pendens construction, as we have already noted.

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 כְּתַבְתָּ הָדוֹד הָזָא. 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, does not actually replace the date, but it does recapitulate it. In a dozen cases, comes immediately after the opening date, acting as a kind of resumptive adverb, e.g., “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 . (On abbreviation by copyists, see Appendix 2 below.) It is unclear whether the use of in 4:9 is to be attributed to copyists or the biblical author.
156 See TAD A3.9 Kraeling 13, line 8: [8], “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-
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 Ayirî 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:

ferring the casus pendens construction. In a collection of letters following Meyer’s format, every document would have a heading beginning מתגננmailer ym ttrplm, frrl prlflm, lpr ypl bkpm. Aan fflchkh fr ff sfcl tflr tflr ffr pm prflm, flcl xrr plc fr yd fr frer the specific letter fr frer fr frer. 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 dia-

gram 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

פהנתא שלוח (4:17) and פהנתא שלוח (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 פהנתא שלוח, 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

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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.
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.” 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?” In short, the technique employed by the biblical author proved too subtle for most subsequent readers, 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.” 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


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.

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 (נַעֲשֵׂה) as containing a document (בּוּר) “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 יִדְעֵן אִמְּרֵיהֶם אֶפְרָאִים אָפְרָאִים אִמְרֵיהֶם אֲרֶם (Ezra 4:9), all of these
terms are ethnonyms, presumably referring to the “peoples whom the great and
glorious Asenappar deported and settled in the cities 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 Baby-
lonia in the great revolt against Ashurbanipal. In 648–645 Ashurbanipal recon-
quered Babylon after a long siege and decimated Elam and its capital, Susa. His
annals say nothing about deportations to Samaria, but they do mention the depor-
tation of Elamites from Kirbit to Egypt.

**Dinaites**

Most modern scholars take נֵיבָד 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 Din-šarru . . . near Susa.” This
identification is virtually unknown today; even those few scholars who still take
ניבד as an ethnonym do not mention it.

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

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169 For this transliteration of the name, note the ga’ya in רֶם found in the editions of
Mordechai Breuer published by Mossad Harav Kook (Jerusalem, 1989) and Horev (Jerusalem, 1997?).
Cf. אֶמֶה in 2 Esdras.

170 The word יָד here is a determined mass noun (“collective”), like the Syriac word used to
render it in the Peshitta and like שָׁם; 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. (Occa-

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. Baet, 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 Echheitsfrage 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). 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. 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.”

It is in no way surprising that the compound toponym Din-šarri would yield an Aramaic ethnonym like ynyd. Indeed, it is even possible that the toponym itself was abbreviated in Aramaic to nyd. The latter would be comparable to the toponym rwd (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.” 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 אֱֺֽדֵּֽוָּהַֽיִּֽים is only a ketiv; the qere is אֱֺֽדֵּֽוָּהַֽיִּֽים. Most modern scholars vocalize the ketiv as אֱֺֽדֵּֽוָּהַֽיִּֽים following the renderingオリエンタル, “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, and singular אֱֺֽדֵּֽוָּה does not agree with its alleged plural antecedent, אֱֺֽדֵּֽוָּהַֽיִּֽים.

It would be better to vocalize the ketiv as אֱֺֽדֵּֽוָּה (cf. אֱֺֽדֵּֽוָּה) based on dauaioi 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 אֱֺֽדֵּֽוָּה, 177 See Maximilian Streck, Assurbanipal and die letzten assyrischen Könige bis zum Untergange Ninivehs (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1916), 2:48–49. See also Eckhard Unger, “Din-Šarri,” Râ (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 Dinaies are separated from the Susanchites. The author of the heading had no reason to be aware of Elamite geography.

177 See Streck, Assurbanipal, 2:318–21.

179 Oded, Mass Deportations, n. 54.


182 BHS and HALAT, 1690, read אֱֺֽדֵּֽוָּה with Vaticanus and a few manuscripts of MT, no doubt the ones cited in Vetus Testamentum Hebraicum, cum varis 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 ġep inscribed in Wadi Hammamat, but these letters are part of an abecedary; see TAD D22.28.
like the one in הָרִירִים, 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. 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].

Apharsites

The term אפרסים 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. 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 Assenappar has yet to be pointed out.

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.
185 Brinkman, Prelude, 97.
Schwiderski. 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”; 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 \( \text{tn(kw/N(kw/t(kw, “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.” 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.” One of the three letters to the Egyptian king was a draft with two addresses, both abbreviated. 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.”

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. . . .” In discussing a more substantive

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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.
omission in the letter, he suggests: “Perhaps it was viewed as irrelevant and omitted already by the copyist of the Jerusalem exemplar.” In the view of Aage Bentzen, “it can well be a copyist’s practice to omit all fixed formulas of epistolographic style.” 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).

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).

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.” 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.

Despite the prevalence of such claims, Schwiderski fails to address them. Take, for example, the praescriptio of Rehum’s letter:

It has long been recognized that there are very close parallels in Official Aramaic letters, e.g., , “to our lord Bagohi gover-
nor of Judah, (from) your servants Jedaniah and his colleagues” (TAD A4.7 Cowley 30), and “to my lord Psami, (from) your servant Makkibain” (TAD A2.4 Bresciani-Kamil 3). 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.” 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). It is true that he views TAD A4.10 as a draft (Entwurf) rather than a copy, 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: "לע רהומ בל תטש טפשאר טפשאר נ朋友们对ו ויד יתבב שיפור הלארא שלאלה שבל כלות נ醐, "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 שלום. In Schwiderski’s view, the salutation 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.” Schwiderski’s conclusion is difficult to reconcile with his recognition that one-word salutations appear already in the Achaemenid period on ostraca: שלום in TAD D7.5 and שלום in D7.6. It is true that these salutations, meaning "your wel-

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202 See above.
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 שְׁלַמְךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּכָל עָקֹל, "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.): "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 ἀγαθή, 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:

1

וָתָּרָא יִבְנוֶהוּ וֹדֵלַה אָמָר

2

לָלֵי וָתָּרָא לָיִי לָכֵּם וֹמֵר

206 Ibid.
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.”
Porten translates:

1Memorandum. What Bagohi 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
4of (ERASURE: Heav)
5Heaven which in Elephantine the fortress built

Grelot appears to follow Cowley in taking the first line of the text as a later
addition. On the other hand, Porten argues, based on the spacing, that the second
line is the later addition. I suggest the following reconstruction, according to
which both views are correct. TAD A4:9 Cowley 32 is not the original memoran-
dum 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:

Grelot, Documents, 415. See above at n. 123.
Bezâlîl Porten, “The Archive of Jedaniah Son of Gemariah of Elephantine—The Structure
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, کمد، did not fit:

He erased the letters ک at the end of line 4.2 and wrote کمد in the right margin of line 4.3. He then erased the words ک ن and wrote کمد over them. The result was our present text, as transcribed above.