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Israelite and Judean Society and Economy

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The Oxford Handbook of the Historical Books of the Hebrew Bible

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Abstract and Keywords

This article examines the economic worlds that correspond to the timeline of the historical books of the Hebrew Bible from the conquest to the return from exile. During this period, Israel and Judah transformed from small subsistence-based tribal economies to more centralized organization, at least partially due to external military threats. Both the northern kingdom and eventually the southern kingdom fell to the Assyrian and Babylonian empires respectively, and the forced migrations instigated socially disembedded economies in the exile and repatriation. Even though these ancient economic modalities are largely assumed and unstated, critical analysis of the historical books requires a thoughtful understanding of the economic world behind these texts.

Keywords: Judah, Israel, economy, archaeology, social-scientific approaches, Iron Age, trade, centralization

11.1 Introduction

THE historical books of the Hebrew Bible describe a chronological period that spans many centuries, from the conquest of Canaan to settlement, monarchy, division, exile, and return. Although the historical books primarily devote themselves to a theological interest, the very task of depicting and illustrating history necessitates certain assumptions regarding the society and economy, and these assumptions are largely unstated. This essay begins with a review of the dominant theoretical approaches to ancient economies in order to better frame the analysis and to serve as a methodological control. These theories then lead to describing the nature of the primary sources for reconstructing the society and economy: biblical texts, extrabiblical texts, and archaeology. The main body of the essay follows the chronology within the historical books from Joshua to Esther. Of course, the delineations are neither clean nor simplistic in terms of assigning biblical books entirely to their purported historical periods, as these texts are composite collections, influenced by editing and ideological bias. At the same time, these biblical books may still reflect certain historical realities, particularly since the social and economic systems were

part of the compilers' subconscious worldview, and less subject to ideological revision compared to religious ideologies. The overarching thesis of this essay is that the historical books indicate both complex and dynamic economic worlds, including periods of subsistence and specialization, limited trade, forced centralization, and both resistance and capitulation to larger empires.

11.2 Theories and Sources

Critical studies on biblical economics remains at a relatively nascent stage. Because economic values are often simultaneously axiomatic and subconscious, it is hard to imagine societal life outside of one's own social frame. For example, how does society function (p. 174) without the tool of money as a medium of exchange? What is the seasonal rhythm of a patriarchal household? What is the nature of agrarian life, whether subsistence-based or collective? How can a disenfranchised kin-group survive, or even thrive, when caught in the orbit of greater empires? Each of these situations were fundamental aspects of economic life for many in ancient Israel and Judah. Consequently, one must step back from modern, and often capitalistic, economic assumptions and think through ways that the ancient economy functioned. In doing so, ancient historians have turned to different economic theories to frame understandings of ancient society as well as to catalyze imagination on distinctly unfamiliar societies.

Most biblical scholarship on the historical books assumes formalism, that is, an economic understanding in line with Adam Smith and general notions of Western capitalism in that an "invisible hand" controlled the market effectively and independently of any central regulations. For formalists, equilibriums deeply align to the self-interest within human nature, and therefore formalist principles of supply and demand are universal in all economies except for pure subsistence societies. For these reasons, formalists would see the ancient economy through values and methods roughly analogous to modern Western economies, only at a much smaller scale. Within the historical books, one may look at the long-distance trade of Solomon with the Phoenician city-state of Tyre (1 Kgs. 5:15-32) as an example of such formalist exchange in which Israel gets access to cedars in exchange for their own grain surpluses. Israel needed the massive timber of cedar to build their own palatial architecture. Tyre lacked a hinterland to provide basic food supplies for their own population. Both parties hold to their competitive advantage in acquiring products that were not accessible within their own natural resources. Therefore, formalism supports an economy based on mutually symbiotic exchanges that are primarily utilitarian with little regard for social relations.

As a response to the nearly axiomatic understanding of a universal capitalism, some ancient economists challenged formalist assumptions by drawing on the growing fields of cultural anthropology. Ethnographic observations revealed that non-Western societies could follow complex economic systems without the use of currency. These so-called substantivist economies revolved around a different set of economic values, namely, duties and obligation, beliefs and magic, social ambitions and vanities. Karl Polanyi (1944) had

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the single greatest influence in articulating a substantivist understanding of ancient economies, arguing that economic transactions of the ancient world were deeply socially embedded, and, therefore, disanalogous to the economies of today. Economic exchange may have had some competitive advantage, but such motivations were secondary to the social impact of exchange. For example, the substantivist may look at the aforementioned long-distance exchange between Solomon and Tyre and determine that the exchange has much more of a social impact. Although both parties economically derive utilitarian benefits from the exchange, the establishment of a more formal relationship between Israel and Tyre was the core motivation for the trade. This deeper relationship later manifests with the political marriage between Israel and Phoenicia and the resulting syncretistic practices that arise among the Israelites.

In addition to formalists and substantivists, scholars applied other interpretive theories to the ancient economies. Karl Marx theorized a grand progression of class struggle along a dialogical continuum, and such an approach continues to this day with modifications.

(p. 175) Norman Gottwald's seminal volume, *The Tribes of Yahweh* (1979), applies a Marxist paradigm to the settlement of Israel, but largely emphasizes the social formation of an inchoate state, rather than focusing on the economic aspect. Regardless of one's feelings for Gottwald's conclusions, he rightly emphasizes the role of kinship as a social unit. Other Marxist advocates draw from particular subsets of Marxist theory, whether emphasizing the means of production (or Asiatic Mode of Production; cf. Wittfogel 1944), the center-periphery imbalances (or World-Systems Theory associated with Wallerstein 2004, though see critique by Altmann 2016: 26; Nam 2012: 40–42), or approaches to economic instability (or Regulation Theory, cf. Boer 2015). Max Weber (1952) provides an additional alternative to capitalism. Weber rejected the universalism of formalist economics, but insisted that each economy adheres to a particular set of ideal types, and for the ancient world patrimonialism was the ideal type for economic life. In a patrimonial system, the centralized government organized itself along the model of a household with the most powerful person (emperor or king) in the role of the chief patriarch. Such a system fostered a shared identity and thus loyalty towards this fictive kinship. This patrimonial concept could be embedded within smaller organizational units such as the tribe or clan. Weber argued that the concept of patrimonial loyalty was much more effective than coercion.

In retrospect of these somewhat contentious debates, an increasing number of approaches recognize the multiplicity of economic perspectives as a more effective method for capturing the complexity of ancient economies. Theoretical assumptions need to be explicit. Not only must scholars refrain from importing modern (and often capitalist) assumptions in interpretation, they must also not be seduced by singular economic theories. As social-scientific tools are less empirical and more heuristic, one must not be on either extreme but look to an assortment of models in analysis of the ancient society and economy.

The economic theories provide a starting point, but these theoretical approaches require sources, specifically biblical texts, extrabiblical texts, and archaeology. In this study of the economy and society of Israel and Judah, we can begin with the actual historical books of

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the Hebrew Bible. The texts begin with the entry to the promised land in the early Iron Age I (1200–1000 BCE), then move to the settlement and period of the judges, the rise of the united monarchy, the subsequent division, the Babylonian exile, the return to Jerusalem, and the rebuilding of the Second Temple during the Persian period (515 BCE). Within this broad chronological scope, critical scholarship has universally recognized that the historical books betray complex layers of textual development. Broadly, one can assume that major portions of these texts were compiled and edited through the prism of exile and later. More significantly, these texts do not intend to present a purely historical account, but rather a theological explanation of the events of the past. Despite these limitations, the historical books provide a starting point to create a clearer picture of the economic and social worlds that these texts inhabit. In addition to biblical texts, extrabiblical sources help to supplement and even supplant biblical descriptions. Extrabiblical sources span a rich assortment of genres, such as economic archives, legal cases, epistolary texts, graffiti, tribute lists, votive offerings, and royal inscriptions. Whereas biblical scholars most famously refer to such extrabiblical texts for parallel studies of passages, such as Genesis and ancient Near Eastern cosmologies, or the confirmation of certain biblical figures like Jehu (Black Obelisk), the vast majority of extrabiblical texts are actually economic in nature. Finally, archaeology (p. 176) serves as an additional, constantly expanding source for our reconstructive efforts. The advent of “new archaeology” of the 1970s utilized more mature social models to build reconstructions rather than the mere recovery of “pure” data. The study of archaeology is vast and overwhelming, but this article will look to broad segments of evidence to observe long-range patterns of continuity and discontinuity, as well as both regional and chronological peculiarities. All of these sources are subject to interpretation, and controversy sometimes attends the interpretation of their form and significance in reconstructing Israelite and Judean society and economy.

11.3 Pre-monarchical Society and Economy: Joshua, Judges, and Ruth

The historical books begin the settlement of God’s people into the Land of Canaan with the divine command, “And now, arise and cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the Israelites. Every place, upon which the sole of your foot will tread, I will give it to you” (Josh. 1:2–3). Chronologically, Joshua covers a narrow period at the beginning of Iron Age I (1200–1000 BCE), and Judges takes place throughout this period before the transition to monarchy. Martin Noth (1991) argued that both Joshua and Judges form part of a lengthier integrated tradition of the Deuteronomistic History (Deuteronomy to 2 Kings, hereafter DH). For some scholars, the first major textualization of the DH takes place in the preexilic time, as early as the eighth century BCE. At the other extreme, several scholars place the writing of the DH primarily during the Persian period, a full five hundred years after the events of Iron Age I. Regardless of the textual origins, Joshua and Judges purport to reflect the economic and social settings of Iron Age I.

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Joshua emphasizes the theme of the acquisition and subsequent allotment of the promised land as the culmination of the patriarchal covenants (Gen. 12:7; cf. 15:7; 17:8). This promise later expands through constant reference to the frequently repeated phrase “land flowing with milk and honey” (Josh. 5:6; cf. Exod. 3:8; Deut. 31:20) to describe the economic quality of this land. Even the moniker of “Canaan” imported some sense of economic bounty as the toponymic descriptor of Canaan has etymological origins in the idea of “trading/importing.” The topography of Israel befits the idea of material blessing. Although the total area is quite narrow, Israel and Judah contain a remarkably diverse topography with drastic changes in elevation, rainfall, soil types, and vegetation from region to region. Generally, the northern lands have a much stronger agricultural potential with large valleys, relatively heavy rainfall, and moderate topographical features. In addition, the north had access to premium trade routes. In contrast, the Judean hills had roughly half the rainfall, harsher land formations, and consequently saw much less settlement activity until the monarchical periods. These topographical differences undergird much of the tribal society of the settlement, but especially the political histories of northern Israel and southern Judah. In the agrarian world of the historical books, land was the single most dominant resource available.

(p. 177) Without strong centralization in the wake of the Late Bronze Age destructions, Joshua and Judges assume a modest economic system and localized leadership. Joshua highlights the importance of kinship by allocating the promised land according to tribe. Passages like Josh. 7:16–18 may hint at the inner workings of tribal society, with distinct subsets of larger tribes and smaller clans. In reality, tribal strength varied, often times emerging collectively as a response to an externalized threat. For example, the Philistines often were an instrument to catalyze a degree of tribal loyalty. These threats were economic in motivation, whether as a short-term raid in desire of more possessions, or the longer-term encroachments upon the promised land. In line with the rest of the DH, obedience to God is the lynchpin for receiving or losing such economic blessings.

This emphasis on tribal kinship in Joshua and Judges leads to major repercussions on the social and economic life. Economic systems of localized tribal leadership were much more modest when compared to the preceding empires of the Late Bronze Age. Archaeologically, the southern Levant witnessed major contraction in both number of sites and overall population in comparison to the massive city-states of the Bronze Age. Sites were largely unfortified and the population was fragmented and de-urbanized. Many of these settlements were not directly on major travel routes, suggesting vulnerability to the dangers of banditry in the wake of a decentralized authority. The land was widely divided, thus economic systems were divided as well. All this suggests that the period of the Judges may reflect a time of less formalized/official economies. Evidence for international trade essentially disappeared, with only minor exceptions near the end of this period with Phoenician and limited Cypriot vessels. Instead of trade, kinship groups largely relied on a subsistence economy with diversified crops and a limited capacity for storage. Though falling outside of the Iron Age I period, the tenth-century Gezer Calendar attests to such subsistence strategies. This limestone text references an agricultural schedule that includes at least six different crops. Such a diverse agrarian schedule contrasts with the highly spe-

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cialized planning of later periods, such as eighth-century Samaria or seventh-century Ekron. The ending chapters of Judges give a negative assessment of this localized tribal leadership with the phrase “in those days, there was no king and everyone did what was right in their own eyes” (Judg. 17:16; 21:25). The explicit reasons are moral failures and external threats, though the economic vulnerabilities also contributed to a movement towards a unified monarchy.

The book of Ruth stands at a distinct place in the preexilic historical books. Although many scholars place the origins of the book of Ruth in the postexilic period, its explicit origins are set in the “days of the Judges” (Ruth 1:1). Within the decentralized social structure of Iron Age I, Ruth presents an insightful look at family kinship. The central figure of Ruth stands as the most disenfranchised person in a deeply patrilineal society like the ancient Near East: female, widowed, foreigner, lacking any economic assets. Despite the admonition to return to Moab, Ruth displays loving-kindness to her mother-in-law and journeys with her. The story intends to show the grace of God given to Ruth through others, but it also implicitly confirms the harshness of life for the marginalized. Ruth does receive favor, but it is primarily not through her agency, except through her sexuality. Instead, she is forced to rely on the kindness of Boaz and the villagers. Eventually, the story ends with a Levirate marriage and the redemption of Ruth through marriage to Boaz.

(p. 178) Immediately with the marriage, Ruth then regains power through her new husband: property, kids, and grafting into Israel through her lineage.

The book of Ruth centers on a single foreign widow, though it spurs additional consideration of the role of women in this period. With the notable exceptions of Deborah and Sisera and others, the books of Joshua and Judges revolve primarily around male figures. Of course, women are essential to any social group, though the extent to which this is true is difficult to ascertain. But for the subsistence strategies of Iron Age I, ethnographic examples can help to illustrate different roles. Carol Meyers (2005) notes a difference between authority (based on cultural legitimacy) and power (based on ability) and suggests that the Iron Age I subsistence economy gave power to women. Because of the importance of labor required for survival in a subsistence society, gender lines were largely blurred, and Meyers postulates that gender hierarchy may have been functionally non-existent. This Iron Age I tribal society would soon transition to a very different economic society with advent of monarchy for Israel as well as neighboring lands.

11.4 Society and Economy during the Transition to Monarchy: 1 and 2 Samuel

The books of 1 and 2 Samuel thematically cover this societal shift from the tribal governance of the Judges to monarchical rule, beginning with Saul, who transitions Israel as both the final judge and the first king. Not surprisingly, the relationship of the biblical portrayal to historical reality of Israel’s state formation is the subject of continued and spirited debate. The biblical claim of the establishment of a centralized monarchy at the inception of Iron Age II (1000–586 BCE) may have some merit in the archaeological

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record. Many sites in the early Iron Age IIA (1000–840/830 BCE) period began to build fortifications and clusters of villages. In the Upper and Lower Galilee, several Iron I settlements vanished and at least some of them were supplanted by larger fortified sites in Iron Age IIA. Samaria and Ephraim show similar patterns. Judah sees consolidation from unwalled Iron I villages to fortified centers in the early Iron Age II throughout its territory including Jerusalem and its surrounding Judean Hills, the Shephelah, coastal plain, and the Negev. Much of this urbanization took place in peripheral areas of the hill country that presumably protected against Philistine encroachment. Centralized planning is not restricted to large-scale architecture. For example, the settlements of the central Negev highlands appear to follow a concerted scheme to create an enclosure to regulate the passing trade routes. These settlements suggest a more centralized authority, spatially organized into districts reflected in 1 Kgs. 4:7–19. Traditionally, archaeologists have turned to common structural designs that demonstrate a degree of uniformity, primarily the six-chambered gates of Megiddo, Hazor, and Gezer (cf. 1 Kgs. 9:15), as indications of a centralized monarchy. With the unified monarchy, Israel moved toward a centralized organization with a complex social structure. The monarchy regulated the distribution of the factors of production, most notably land and labor. In order to create surpluses to support a bureaucratic class, (p. 179) specializations emerged in contrast to the diversified labor systems of the Iron Age I subsistence economies. The patterns of labor for such a society may be reflected in 1 Sam. 8:11–17 with references to multiple professions and stratified social classes in the context of the negative assessment of monarchy.

More recently, different groups of scholars have challenged the historicity of the united monarchy as described in biblical traditions. Drawing on anthropological studies of chiefdom societies, Robert Coote and Keith Whitelam (1987) describe a much more moderate understanding of the early Iron Age IIA period, declaring it a chiefdom and not a monarchy. Under this view, the development to state formation did not occur until later than the tenth century. This chiefdom model found allied support from a branch of archaeology, namely, the proponents of the so-called low chronology. Israel Finkelstein (Finkelstein and Mazar 2007) argues that the stratigraphy of the gates of Megiddo, Hazor, and Gezer should be down-dated to the ninth century. In the absence of any fixed anchor for the early Iron Age II period, Finkelstein and his adherents contend for a low chronology in that these gates do not belong to any united monarchy, but they ascribe the building activity and the centralization to rulers like the Omrides. For these interpreters, the regional chiefdom had two primary characteristics. First, such a social organization relied on distinguished social rank, with the chief as the highest rank. This chief had to organize economic networks and group identity, often using religion as a tool. Second, social organization was regionally defined. Economic decisions no longer revolved around the subsistence strategies of the kinship-based household, as they did in Iron Age I, but along larger regional organization. Chiefs needed to effectively control resources of labor and land to execute more efficient defense and agrarian strategies such as terracing. Regional chiefdoms also relied on greater interregional trade.

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Overall, more Levantine archaeologists subscribe to the high chronology, which supports a relatively positive assessment of the historicity of the biblical description of the early monarchy—namely, that a single royal house actually did consolidate land and that many of the traditional Iron Age IIA structures legitimately are products of a centralized royal building plan. Regardless, the Iron Age IIA brought the advent of a more deliberate centralization program and a major shift in the economic and social organization. This visible shift in social organization from regional tribal leadership (Iron Age I) to a more centralized decision making, whether monarchical or chiefdom, had major repercussions on economy and society. The inability of outside empires to effectively penetrate the region spawned opportunities for significant trade. As a result, this increased economic activity naturally generated parallel developments. The increased productivity through more collective agriculture and trade naturally resulted in more developed public architecture: royal residences, enclosures, cultic places, and fortifications. The central authority needed to implement means for collection of various goods and labor as well as some system of bureaucracy. Agricultural specialization and increased trade required greater storage capacities, resulting in the appearance of massive silos and tripartite buildings at multiple sites. But one must be careful not to overstate stratification. The early Iron Age II period often associated with the united monarchy undoubtedly saw a general pattern of political centralization. But it was modest compared with later years as Israel split into northern and southern kingdoms.

(p. 180) **11.5 Society and Economy and the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah: 1 and 2 Kings**

After the end of Solomon's reign, the united monarchy split into the northern kingdom of Israel and southern kingdom of Judah along tribal lines. Understanding the difference between the two states is crucial for interpreting the portrayal of the divided monarchy. Northern Israel had significantly more advanced and structured economic systems. This befits much of the historical geography of northern Israel in comparison to the south. They had many more natural resources and agricultural potential. They also controlled strategic land routes such as the Megiddo Pass, which overlooked the Carmel ridge serving as a major passage between Mesopotamia and Egypt. Northern Israel enjoyed a much more robust economy as exhibited by multiple lines of material culture evidence. The capital of Samaria in Iron Age IIB contained a large collection of Phoenician-style decorated ivories. The Samaria Ostraca indicate a distribution list of luxury products to a cabal, strategically spaced around the city. The pottery vessels evidence significant trade via the Phoenician city-states, particularly Tyre. This economic thriving was surely one of the major reasons for the political turmoil of the northern kingdom, and thus informs a critical reading of 1 and 2 Kings. First, the economic advantages of the north present it as a naturally more desirable target for both internal usurpation of power and colonization from outside polities. Second, the economic thriving of the northern kingdom highlights some of the social commentary against the stratification that comes with economic growth. The critique against the privileged is most pronounced in Amos and Hosea, but it certainly

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has a parallel in the prophetic narratives of Elijah and Elisha, particularly in their own polemic against the wealthy.

Similar to the northern kingdom, Judah continued to transition towards greater urbanization in terms of settlement size and the growing sophistication of the architecture, though at a much more modest rate. Defense systems were improved both in fortifications as well as intricate water storage systems. Major storage facilities were also a defensive strategy against military siege. With the external threat of the Assyrians, both text and material culture point to a broad centralization, at least on the macro level. One of the most telling signs of centralization is the spatial distribution of the *lmlk* ("for the king") seals on large storage vessels, suggesting a royal collection during the late eighth century, presumably in preparation for defense against an oncoming Assyrian invasion. In addition, from the eighth century, writing begins to flourish, indicating a growing administrative branch and development into a more complex political economy. Specifically, much of these material signs point to centralization in line with the nature of economic activity. From a biblical perspective, the centralization was an effort to purge the country from syncretistic idolatrous practices. But the economic effect was the movement of economic power from a regional level to a central level, empowering the Judean monarchy to prepare better its defenses from outside invasion.

(p. 181) Although the economy had advanced, the period of the divided kingdom continued to have a socially embedded economy. Kinship, whether fictive or genetic, dominated the social world. Most of the portrayals of economic activity are examples of reciprocal or symmetrical exchange in order to foster new social ties and maintain older ones. One prime example is the exchange between Solomon and Sheba (1 Kgs. 10). In this exchange, Sheba and her retinue travel far and engage Solomon in a test of wisdom. Only upon Solomon's successful passing of the test does Sheba give Solomon a generous assortment of luxurious gifts of gold, spices, precious stone, and imported wood (1 Kgs. 10:10-11). In response, Solomon gives back, "all that she desired" (1 Kgs. 10:13). Interestingly, no mention is made of any sort of negotiation towards price equilibrium, a hallmark of supply and demand exchange. Rather, the two participants of the exchange seem to engage in mutual praise and one-upping each other's generosity. Although such gifts may have some economic utility, such motivations are secondary to the reinforcement of a social connection. These gifts were done between both elite (1 Kgs. 5:15-32; 2 Kgs. 20:12-15) and non-elite (1 Kgs. 14:1-3) and often across social levels for both empowering the disenfranchised (1 Kgs. 17:8-15; 2 Kgs. 4:1-7) and subverting authority (1 Kgs. 13:1-10; 2 Kgs. 5:8-27; 8:7-11). Non-elite gifting does not leave much in the archaeological evidence, but one can observe the arrangements of the domestic residences in deliberate clusters. This spatial arrangement suggests that social bonds dictated economic life, which surely included reciprocity among kin. Such gifting was an integral part of ancient Near Eastern societies (substantivism), though the degree to which it permeated Israel and Judah remains under discussion.

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In addition to reciprocity, 1 and 2 Kings show significant levels of asymmetrical redistribution as well. Redistribution is the movement of goods from the periphery to an authoritative center, then the redistribution of these goods, often in a different form, to the people. Like reciprocity, the movements of economy redistribution are socially embedded. But because of the asymmetrical nature, redistribution is not necessarily egalitarian, but based on a locus of authority that enforces the redistribution through either political or social coercion. For example, Solomon gathered foodstuffs (1 Kgs. 4:7), labor (1 Kgs. 5:27–32), and livestock for sacrifice (1 Kgs. 8:62–63). These goods then get redistributed in the form of a glorious palace and sustenance of the bureaucratic and priestly groups. Because of the emphasis on asymmetry, redistributive exchange potentially works well with some of the core-periphery approaches associated with Wallerstein (2004). From 1 Kgs. 9, the centralization efforts are deemed as oppressive, and eventually create a schism in the kingdom.

Although reciprocity and redistribution appear to serve as the dominant modes of exchange, some aspects of market economy arise. In 1 Kgs. 20:34, Ahab wins concessions to set up markets in Damascus. While under siege, the economy of Samaria sees hyperinflation to the diminishing supply and demand (2 Kgs. 6:24–25). One of the most blatant examples of market exchange occurs in 2 Kgs. 4:1–7: Elisha meets a destitute foreign widow, restores her empty jars with oil, and commands her to “go outside (to the market?) and pay your debts.” Although the passage focuses on the aspect of prophetic provision for the destitute, the mechanism of the exchange clearly points to some degree of market orientation. The foreign widow had no assets, no kinship ties, and yet Elisha presumes that she has access to a market where she can exchange oil to fulfill debt obligations. The oil functions as a medium of exchange even in the absence of any social connection. These (p. 182) infrequent examples, however, cannot determine the nature of these exchange mechanisms against one another. The economies of Israel and Judah were complex and varied. There was growing stratification and deeper complexities. At the same time, preexilic Israel and Judah had relative independence, and their economies organically grew, keeping sight of a shared economy under regional variation and aspects of common worship, as well as duties to the monarchy. All of this would change in the aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem.

11.6 Society and Economy and the Babylonian Exile: The Exilic Editions of the Deuteronomistic History

Though it stands as the single most transformative event in the society and economy of Judah, the historical books devote merely a single chapter (2 Kgs. 25) to the sacking of Jerusalem. The traumatic destruction of both the temple and the Davidic line, and the ensuing forced migrations, whether as prisoners or refugees, overturned the traditional kin-based social structures. In the reality of the temple ruins, the Judeans were forced to

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reinterpret the self-proclaimed identity as God's people now that they lost independence and were subjects of another empire.

As often the case with military invasion, the Jerusalem capitulation reversed the economic booms of the preexilic world, resulting in a depressed economy of subsistence and abandonment. The scope of this disaster in the historical books matches well with the limited understanding of the destruction. Because of the relatively short reign of the Babylonian Empire and the lack of distinction between the Babylonian and ensuing Persian period in the archaeological record, the sources for reconstructing Babylonian-period economy and society are modest. But a few broad strokes can be surmised. The Babylonian period shows a sharp break in continuity throughout the southern Levant, including Judah. In addition to the surroundings of Jerusalem (including Jerusalem itself), Ramat Rachel, and Beth Shemesh, destruction layers appear in Philistia, the Northern Coast, Lachish, the Shephelah, and the Beer-sheva valley. Most of these sites do not have any Babylonian remains, suggesting widescale abandonment. The only major places of continuity are in Central Samaria and Mizpah, which likely served as a Babylonian administrative center. Excavations also point to an abrupt stoppage of significant trade. Overall, archaeology presents a fairly compelling picture of widescale destruction and abandonment in comparison to the preexilic period, though archaeologists differ as to the extent of such destruction with population decline estimates from 90 percent to 70 percent (Faust 2012). It is important to point out a minority of scholars advocate that the actual destruction of the Babylonian invasion was much more moderate than reported in biblical texts. These scholars advocate that the biblical texts represent a small portion of the Judeans, or even in some cases, that the Babylonian destruction was a fabrication by elite scribal literati, attempting to create an identity through a collective memory. But this is a minority view, as the material culture and biblical texts carry a similar tone of destruction and devastation, and the economic life struggled in the wake of the Babylonian destruction.

(p. 183) Not only did the exile devastate the economy, but it also devastated the kinship systems that undergirded social organization. The forced migrations wiped out the kin-based systems. Family units contracted from the extended kin to the nuclear family. Many of these peoples were deported to Babylonia or they fled as refugees. In response to this displacement, life in exile quickly rebounded for some of these refugees. Though the actual exile event was surely traumatic, several scholars suggest a benign existence for exiles in Babylonia. Many of the exiles lived in designated spaces for exiled communities with relative independence. Two particular collections richly illustrate the lives of these exiles, the Al-Yehuda Tablets (Pearce and Wunsch 2014) and the Murashu Archives. Both hint at a relative normalcy of family life, agricultural production, labor opportunities, and even some economic thriving. This matches some of the biblical depictions of exiles' ability to purchase land and raise families (Jer. 29). In addition to Babylon, some of the socially displaced also made their way to Egypt, negotiating a space between their own Jewish identity, with worship and affinities to Jerusalem, and the need to assimilate. Overall, the limited evidence suggests relative freedom under a larger political hegemony. One can reasonably ascertain that the economic and social world of the Babylonian Empire was initially chaotic as fitting a refugee experience, but over the years these refugees potentially

began a path towards assimilation and normalcy for a colonized state. The picture of such a state becomes more clear with the advent of the Persian Empire.

11.7 Economy and Society and the Persian Period: 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Esther, and Postexilic Redactions of the Deuteronomistic History

The end of the Babylonian period marked the beginning of a profound shift in the economy and society of Judah. Ezra-Nehemiah picks up from the exile event that closes both 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles. Although the people return to Jerusalem, they will remain a subjugated people. The opening verses of Ezra-Nehemiah acknowledge the Persian king Cyrus as the leader of the society and economy, as he sanctions the return of the exiles to Jerusalem. Theologically, this verse sets the stage for a discourse that centers on the proper worship of Yhwh while underneath Persian imperial hegemony. From an economic perspective, the repatriation under Persian rule begins a profound change. The area of Judah became an extension of the Persian Empire, within the satrapy "Beyond the River." This followed the known strategy of the Achaemenid Empire to establish political control, security, and the collection of royal and satrapal taxes.

As mentioned, the demarcation between the Babylonian and Persian periods is nearly impossible to delineate, not just in archaeology, but even in the neo-Babylonian archives. This reveals that the early Persian Empire was likely marked by continuity with its predecessors in terms of the administration of the empire. Archaeologically, the impact (p. 184) of the Babylonian destruction remained evident through the Persian period. Even traditionally large sites, such as Jerusalem and Shechem, remained small rural towns during this period. With the lack of resources on Persian Judah (or Yehud), Ezra-Nehemiah serves as a main source. According to the narrative, the people returned and rebuilt the Jerusalem temple with provisions from the Persian Empire. In return, Ezra-Nehemiah espouses a robust centralization program focusing on the proper temple worship. In addition, some of the epistolary texts in the middle of the narrative suggest that the Judeans had major in-kind and precious metal taxes that regularly went to the Persian Empire. Within the text, economics function as a central dynamic to undergird broader theological themes. For example, the donations to the temple constitute an act of identity formation under the worship of Yhwh. On an international level, the Judeans are an agent in the movement of goods/taxes to and from the Persian Empire (Ezra 4:17). Nehemiah continues this theme of economic centralization by portraying the Persian king as magnanimous provider, but also addressing the role of the elite within Judah for the disenfranchised (Neh. 5:1-18) and the function of the Levites and temple servants (Neh. 13:4-22).

Whereas Ezra-Nehemiah describes the repatriation, Chronicles reinforces the notion of a colonized and socially disembedded economy. Chronicles can indirectly present an interesting perspective on the economics of the Persian period, particularly if one compares

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parallel economic texts with the older source of Samuel/Kings. Two perspectives emerge, the first of which portrays exchange as less socially embedded and more utilitarian. One of the prominent examples is the tendency for Chronicles to inflate the numbers from earlier sources. For example, the payment for the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite rises from 50 shekels in 2 Sam. 24:24 to 600 shekels in 1 Chr. 21:25. This increase does not align to any hyperinflation, but rather reflects a consistent theme of directing resources to the temple. Independent Chronicles materials have similar themes of abundance such as David's call to mass donations from the peoples (1 Chr. 29:6-9). In the second perspective, Chronicles contains some of the few references to coinage, specifically the Daric, which is unique to Chronicles (1 Chr. 29:7), Ezra (2:69; 8:27), and Nehemiah (7:70-72). Although the development of coinage may have multiple functions (market functions, taxation), in the contexts of the Bible, coinage always supports the donation to the center through the means of cultic materials.

The book of Esther, though explicitly set in the Persian period, is likely a compilation that has at least some Hellenistic influence. Esther follows a subgenre of "court tales" in which a foreigner comes to power in a foreign court (see also the Joseph narrative and Daniel). This subgenre naturally found appeal in the Babylonian and Persian periods when Judeans had to make sense of their own theology in the midst of a vast empire. Although the names in Esther have no historical confirmation, and the figure of Mordecai is surely anachronistic, the book does present some assumptions of royal family life that are plausible and consistent with Persian governance. It is clear that the Persian royal family has control and has subjugated the Judeans so that their very existence is dependent on the imperial powers.

Though the assumption is not without opponents, many scholars also generally assign priestly materials to a postexilic layer. The P layer is consistent in keeping a temple ideology as a tool for centralization. Naturally, most of the studies on P center on the theological assertions for holiness, divine transcendence, and proper worship. In line with the (p. 185) traditional priestly emphasis on worship (especially the tabernacle narratives of Exodus), P brings an emphasis on the economic contributions of the priestly people towards the tabernacle construction (Exod. 25; 28:21-29; 30:12-13; 35:4, 20-29; 36:3-7; Altmann 2016: 192-95). This emphasis aligns with the people's donations to the temple in Ezra. The redaction of Josh. 20:6, traditionally assigned to P, can illustrate this emphasis in two ways. First, the cities of refuge in Joshua give the priestly circles a level of judicial authority. Second, the multiple references to the "congregation" place the religious community as transcendent over the tribes in economic priority.

11.8 Summary and Conclusions

The vast chronological period from conquest to repatriation reveals a rich and complex economic world. The multiple social contexts necessitate an awareness of these shifts as Israel developed into a nation and then fell into disarray in the orbit of greater empires. With dialogue between textual studies and archaeology, as well as the use of eco-

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conomic theories as a control, one can gain a firmer understanding of the ancient social and economic worlds that undergird the historical books. Continued investigation will yield more sophisticated understandings of Israelite and Judean society and economy, and, in turn, lead to deeper readings of the biblical texts.

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