Sanballat and Tobiah Challenging Boundaries in the Book of Nehemiah

(first draft)

Kristin Joachimsen, University of Tromsø

kristin.joachimsen@uit.no

Introduction

The reframing of traditions related to experiences of exile and restoration, as well as continuity and discontinuity, have influenced the formation of Judean identities in the Persian period, in which we can find traces in Jewish identity formation also in our time. The terminology used for defining different groups in the Persian period, both when it comes to the definitions of the Judeans and of others, is ambiguous. This reflects a situation of transitions of boundaries and identity during the post-exilic era. The concept of Israel, for instance, is vague in this time. It embraces religious, ethnic and geographic aspects; and is a conglomerate of various groups: descendants of the indigenous population of the Kingdom of Judah, returnees from the Babylonian Exile, Mesopotamians exiled by Assyrian Kings, and the like. The experience of the exile becomes one of many ingredients in the community's struggle for identity. Strategies of exclusion are related to, for instance, denial of participation in the cult and rejection of mixed marriage. In this, the distinction between the historical circumstances and the terminology of self-definition is intriguing.

The Book of Nehemiah

The office of Nehemiah and his enterprises in the time of Artaxerxes are crucial to the events narrated in the book of Nehemiah.[1] His mission is to restore the broken city walls, a task which is met with opposition.[2] Nehemiah is the king's cupbearer in the Persian court (1:11) and תִּרְשָׁתָא "governor" (8:9, 10:2)[3]; he resides in the fortress of Susa (1:1, 5:14-16, 13:6-7) and is acting in Jerusalem by permission of the king (2:6, 13:6-7). His concern is related to the Judeans, the remnant of those who survived the captivity and with Jerusalem (1:1-2)[4] and his ancestors are buried in Jerusalem (2:3). He is speaking on behalf of himself, his ancestral house (בֵּית־אָבִי) and בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל "the children of Israel" (1:6). Nehemiah himself might work as an illustration of how collective identities might be multiple and overlapping, with ties both to the Judean community and the Persian king.

In the book of Nehemiah, a distinction is made between the people of the Judean community and those who do not belong to this. From Nehemiah's point of view it seems to be about him and his allies against the neighbouring peoples like Samarians (3:34), Ashodites (4:1, 13:23), Arabs (4:1), Moabites (13:1;23) and Ammonites (4:1, 13:23) and their leaders, where his main adversaries are Sanballat ("the Horonite"), Tobiah ("the Ammonite") and Geshem ("the Arab").[5] Nehemiah mentions these leaders with their geographical affiliation and not with their official titles and roles in the area. As we shall see below, Sanballat and Tobiah are challenging a clear-cut definition of who's ally and who's adversary in the Judean community.

The "Nehemiah Memoir"

Neh. 1-7; 12:27-43 and 13, is a story about Nehemiah and his activities, which is entitled the "Nehemiah Memoir" by the majority of EN scholars. This is I-speech

[1] While most scholars regard the books of Ezra and Nehemiah as one composition, I prefer to read them separately, cf. J.C. VanderKam, "Ezra-Nehemiah or Ezra and Nehemiah" in E. Ulrich, J.W. Wright, R.P. Carroll and P.R. Davies (eds.), *Priests, Prophets, and Scribes: Essays in the Formation and Heritage of Second Temple Judaism in Honour of Joseph Blenkinsopp* (JSOTSup, 149; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992) 55-76, D. Kraemer, "On the Relationship of the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah", *JSOT* 59 (1993) 73-93, B. Becking, "Ezra's Re-Enactment of the Exile" in L.L. Grabbe (ed.), *Leading Captivity Captive: 'The Exile' as History and Ideology* (JSOTSup, 278= European Seminar in Historical Methodology, 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 47-48, and M. Cohen, "Leave Nehemiah Alone: Nehemiah's 'Tales' and Fifth-Century BCE Historiography" in M.J. Boda and P.L. Redditt (eds.), *Unity and Disunity in Ezra and Nehemiah: Redaction Rhetoric, and Reader* (Hebrew Bible Monographs, 17; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008) 55-74, who argue that the two books convey different interests and perspectives. Kraemer argues, for instance, that the book of Ezra has a priestly authorship, with its focus on restoration of the temple and cult, while the book of Nehemiah is written by lay people who regard the law as a focus for holiness.

[2] P. Bedford, "Diaspora: Homeland Relations in Ezra-Nehemiah", *VT* 52 (2002) 150 and G.N. Knoppers, "Nehemiah and Sanballat: The Enemy Without or Within?" in O. Lipschits, G.N. Knoppers and R. Albertz (eds.), *Judah and the Judeans in the Fourth Century B.C.E.* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007) 316, n. 32.

[3] The title תִּרְשָׁתָא also appears in Neh. 7:65 (par. in Ezra 2:63);69. It has been explained as a Persian word, working as a variation of פֶּחָה "governor", a title elsewhere ascribed to Shesbazzar, Zerubbabel and Nehemiah. For a discussion on the uncertainty of תִּרְשָׁתָא, see H.G.M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (WBC, 16: Waco, TX: World Books, 1985) 27 (63.a.).

[4] Cf. n. 10.

[5] Sanballat is mentioned in 2:10;19, 3:33, 4:1, 6:1;2;5;14, 13:28 (called Horonite in 2:10;19, 13:28), Tobiah in 2:10;19, 3:35, 4:1, 6:1;12;14;17;19, 13:4;7 (called Ammonite in 2:10;19, 3:35) and Geshem in 2:19, 6:1-2 (called Arab in 2:19 and 6:1); in 6:16 called Gashmu. See more on Sanballat in n. 13, Tobiah in n. 14 and Geshem in n. 20.

conveyed in the mouth of Nehemiah, recounting events in which he is personally involved.[6]

Williamson distinguishes two stages in the composition of the Nehemiah Memoir: an earlier building account (1:1-5:13, 6:1-7, parts of 12:27-43) and a later addition written by Nehemiah himself (5:14-19, 13:4-14;15-22;23-31), after serving as a governor for 12 years.[7]

J.L. Wright has recently offered another contribution to the composition of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. This study, which is characterised by a literary-critical approach, is further based on W. Zimmerli, O.H. Steck and R.G. Kratz.[8] According to Wright, Neh. 1-13 developed in seven main strata. The first stratum is a short building report in 1:1a;11b, 2:1-6;11;15;16a;17;18b, 3:38, 6:15. The texts which will be treated in this paper belong to Wright's third stratum, 2:10;19-20, 3:33-34;35;36-37, 4:1-3; 4-9;10-17, 5:16-18, 6:5-9;16, which introduces Nehemiah's conflict with Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem and his fifth stratum, in which Nehemiah institutes "extramural" reforms (1:1b-4, 5:1-13;19, 6:10-14;17-19 and 13:4-14;15-22;22-30a;31b).[9]

Nehemiah, the Judean Community and Opposition in the Book of Nehemiah

While הַגּוֹלָה-terminology is prominent in the book of Ezra, it is mentioned only once in the book of Nehemiah, that is, in the list of the returnees in 7:6: הָעֹלִים מִשִּׁבְיֵ הַגּוֹלָה "those who came up from the captivity of the exile" (par. Ezra 2:1). In the book of Nehemiah, the people of the Judean community are further designated as הַשָּׁבִים מִן־הַשִּׁבְיָ כָּל־הַקָּהָל "the whole congregation, those who had returned from the captivity" (8:17), הַיְּהוּדִים הַפְּלֵיטָה אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁאֲרוּ מִן־הַשֶּׁבִי "the Judeans, the remnant who had survived the captivity" (1:2), הַנִּשְׁאָרִים אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁאֲרוּ מִן־הַשִּׁבְיָ "the survivors who had survived the captivity" (1:3) as well as יִשְׂרָאֵל/בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (1:6, 2:10, 7:7;72, 8:1;14;17, 9:1;2, 10:34;40, 11:3;20, 12:47, 13:3;18) and הַיְּהוּדִים "the Judeans", the last one which can

[6] While Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, pp. xxxiii-xxxv;8;28-30;201-202, suggests a combination and rearrangement of the Ezra Memoir (Ezra 7-10;Neh. 8) and the Nehemiah Memoir, to which Ezra 1-6 was added later, J. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1988) 40-47, takes the Nehemiah Memoir to be added later into Ezra 1-10; Neh. 8.
[7] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, p. xxiii.
[8] J.L. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity: The Nehemiah-Memoir and its Earliest Readers* (BZAW, 348; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004) 4, n. 14.
[9] A summary of all the levels is given in Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, pp. 330-340. For a brief overview of various recent explanations of the Nehemiah Memoir, see Knoppers, "Nehemiah and Sanballat", p. 309.

refer to the inhabitants of Judah(1:2[10], 2:16, 3:33-34, 5:1;17, 6:6, 13:23, though there were Judeans living elsewhere (4:6, 5:8).[11] Eskenazi regards הַיְּהוּדִים "the Judeans" as Nehemiah's primary group, just as הַגּוֹלָה "the returned exiles" is the primary community of Ezra: "Nehemiah's initial inquiry pertains to the fate of the Judeans who had remained in the land (note the repetition of אשר־נשארו מן־השבי in Neh. 1:2 and 1:3)."[12] According to her, these two groups do not converge, since the names in the list of the builders in Neh. 3:1-32 are not the same as those mentioned in the book of Ezra.

Nehemiah presents the peoples as his foes. He speaks about הַגּוֹיִם אוֹיְבֵינוּ "our enemies, the peoples" (5:9, cf. 6:16: "When כָּל־אוֹיְבֵינוּ 'all our enemies' heard it, כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר סְבִיבוֹתֵינוּ 'all the nations round about us were intimidated'"). מִכֹּל בְּנֵי נֵכָר זֶרַע יִשְׂרָאֵל "those of the stock of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners" (9:2) and the people separated כָּל־עֵרֶב "all of mixed descent" from Israel (13:3). A union of "the rest of the people", the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants and כָּל־הַנִּבְדָּל מֵעַמֵּי הָאֲרָצוֹת "all who separated themselves from the peoples of the lands", together with the nobles of their brothers, took an oath with sanctions to follow the Law of God (10:28-31), while Nehemiah separated his people מִכָּל־נֵכָר "from anything foreign" (13:30). Strategies of exclusion are related to, for instance, denial of participation in the cult and rejection of intermarriages: Mixed marriages with Ashodite, Ammonite and Moabite women are regarded as an abomination (13:23), cf. also the treatment of נָשִׁים נָכְרִיּוֹת "foreign women" (13:26-27). The marriage of the grand-child of the high priest Eliashib with the daughter of Sanballat leads to a pollution of the priestly lineage (13:28). No Ammonite or Moabite are allowed to enter קְהַל הָאֱלֹהִים "the congregation of God" (13:1). Nehemiah expels Tobiah from one of the storerooms in the temple, since his presence is ritually defiling (13:4-9).

[10] In Neh. 1:2, Nehemiah is asking some men of Judah who are visiting him in Susa, about מִן־הַשִּׁבְיָ הַיְּהוּדִים הַפְּלֵיטָה אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁאֲרוּ "the Judeans, the remnant who had survived the captivity". This phrase has been interpreted in different ways: Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, p. 207 takes it to refer to those who had never left the land, and adds: "In general, Nehemiah, unlike Ezra, is not at all concerned with return from exile, and the heavily charged language used here occurs nowhere else in the Nehemiah material." L.L. Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (Florence, KY: Routledge, 1998) 39-40, on the other hand, takes the phrase to mean the הַגּוֹלָה community, while Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, p. 171, suggests that a distinction between Judeans who had returned from the Babylonian exile and those who had remained in the land might not have been intended in the first place.
[11] Neh. 4:6 and Neh. 5:8 is treated in n. 34 below.
[12] T.C. Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah* (SBLMS, 36; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) 81-82, quotation is taken from p. 81.

Neh. 2: Sanballat and Tobiah become very displeased and deride Nehemiah and his people

The butler of the Persian king, Nehemiah, is permitted by the king to go to Jerusalem to restore the city walls (2:6). Upon his own request, Nehemiah is equipped with a letter from the king, addressed to the governors Beyond the River (v. 7), to assure that he will get a safe journey. He asks for yet another letter to Asap, the keeper of the king's park, so that he may supply him with timber for the restoration to be done (v. 8). Nehemiah is also accompanied by an armed guard (v. 9). When he arrives Jerusalem, some adversary inhabitants become dissatisfied:

Neh. 2:10:

10 וַיִּשְׁמַע סַנְבַלַּט הַחֹרֹנִי וְטֹבִיָּה הָעֶבֶד הָעַמּוֹנִי וַיֵּרַע לָהֶם
רָעָה גְדֹלָה אֲשֶׁר־בָּא אָדָם לְבַקֵּשׁ טוֹבָה לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל׃

2:10. When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard about this, they were very displeased that someone had come to improve the welfare of the children of Israel.

Sanballat the Horonite[13] and Tobiah the Ammonite servant[14] become very annoyed when hearing that Nehemiah is coming to promote the welfare of Israel. In this presentation, the Horonite and Ammonite are contrasted with the בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל "children of Israel", that is, they are described by religious and political motivated terms.[15] Nehemiah consistently mentions these adversaries with these geographical affiliations and not with their official titles and roles in the area.[16] It has been suggested that the term הָעֶבֶד "the servant" conveys an ambiguity, as it can both point to Tobiah's official

[13] The Horonite Sanballat might imply that he regarded himself as an Ephraimite, that is, associated with one of the northern tribes. He might also descent from Assyrians who governed Samaria from the late eight century or Israelites deported to Assyria (Lemaire). He has even been taken as belonging to בני הגולה (Mittmann). Or that he was given a Babylonian name. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, p. 216-217: "That Sanballat was a YHWH worshiper may be deduced from the names of his sons known from an Elephantine letter (Delaiah and Shemaiah)", cf. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, p. 182. On Sanballat as worshipper, see also p. 8 below. For an overview of identifications of Sanballat, see Knoppers, "Nehemiah and Sanballat", p. 325. See also on Sanballat in n. 4.

[14] Tobiah is mentioned in Neh. 2:10;19, 3:35, 4:1, 6:1;12;14, 13:4-9. He is often takeen to be an assistant of Sanballat in Samaria (Clines, p. 145 and Williamson, pp. 183-184). Others have associated him with a Yahwistic group in Ammon (Meyers', p. 340-343), as a Judean (Jerusalemite) residing in Ammon (Grabbe, pp. 192-198) or as belonging to בני הגולה (Blenkinsopp, pp. 92;218-219). Knoppers, "Nehemiah and Sanballat", pp. 317-318, takes Tobiah to be a governor of Ammon, who viewed himself as a member of Israel, perhaps one of the Transjordanian tribes. Knoppers' arguments are related to Tobiah's Ammonite residency and Nehemiah's derogatory reference to him as "Ammonite" (Neh. 2:10;19, 3:35). For an overview of identifications of Tobiah, see Knoppers, pp. 317-318. See also on Tobiah in n. 4.

[15] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, p. 182. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, p. 219, suggests a pun on Tobiah's name: Nehemiah had come to Judah to advance טוֹבָה of Israel, and Israel to whom טֹבִיָּה, an Ammonite, could never belong (cf. Neh. 13:1, Deutr. 23:4-7).

[16] Cf. Sanballat in nn. 4 and 13 and Tobiah in nn. 4 and 14.

status as governor as well as be used in a derogatory manner. Williamson suggests another ambiguity, namely that Tobiah the Ammonite is the assistant of Sanballat.[17]

Grabbe explains that Sanballat and Tobiah might become angry because they regard Nehemiah as a potential rival. The letter from the king to the governors of the satrapy of Beyond the River assures a safe journey (v. 7), but Grabbe argues that it may also indicate that Nehemiah has been granted the office of a governor of Yehud.[18] If Nehemiah is appointed as governor in Yehud (cf. 5:14), he could have been regarded as a potential competitor of them.[19]

After a secret journey to survey the wall at night, accompanied by a few men (vv. 12-15), Nehemiah presents his plan to הַיְּהוּדִים, the priests, the nobles, the community officials (סְגָנִים) and the יֶתֶר "rest" (vv. 16-17). He invites Judeans to rebuild (v. 17). The rebuilding plan is due to God's will, approved by the king and supported by all the men (v. 18). Then follows more opposition, as Nehemiah becomes mocked by Sanballat, Tobiah and one more allied:

Neh. 2:19-20:

19 וַיִּשְׁמַע סַנְבַלַּט הַחֹרֹנִי וְטֹבִיָּה הָעֶבֶד הָעַמּוֹנִי וְגֶשֶׁם הָעַרְבִי
וַיַּלְעִגוּ לָנוּ וַיִּבְזוּ עָלֵינוּ וַיֹּאמְרוּ מָה־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם
עֹשִׂים הֲעַל הַמֶּלֶךְ אַתֶּם מֹרְדִים׃20 וָאָשִׁיב אוֹתָם דָּבָר וָאֹמַר
לָהֶם אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם הוּא יַצְלִיחַ לָנוּ וַאֲנַחְנוּ עֲבָדָיו נָקוּם
וּבָנִינוּ וְלָכֶם אֵין־חֵלֶק וּצְדָקָה וְזִכָּרוֹן בִּירוּשָׁלִָם׃

2:19. When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arabian heard about it, they derided us and held us in contempt. "What is this that you are doing?", they asked. "Are you rebelling against the king?" 20. I replied to them by saying, "The God of heaven will give us success. We, his servants, will start to rebuild; but you have no share, right or memorial in Jerusalem."

To the two adversaries Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite slave, a third one is added: Geshem the Arabian.[20] When these three men hear about the rebuilding plan, they despise Nehemiah and his allies and ask whether they are rebelling against the king. Nehemiah replies by appealing to the support of the plan by "the God of heaven" (cf. 1:5, 2:4). He also claims that the accusers have neither חֵלֶק "share", צְדָקָה "right" nor זִכָּרוֹן "memorial" in Jerusalem. Williamson understands this as an

[17] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, p. 183.

[18] Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, pp. 41-42.

[19] Also Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, p. 182 sees Sanballat's role as "caretaker" as a potential reason for jealousy.

[20] On Geshem (Kedarites), see also n. 4.

expression for how "Nehemiah is denying to his opponents civic, legal, and cultic rights in the Jerusalem community".[21]

Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite slave, and Geshem the Arabian are not Israel, they are outsiders. They have no rights, in any manner, in Jerusalem, while Nehemiah and his people are supported by "the God of heaven" and are also called עֲבָדָיו "his servants" (2:20). While in 2:10 the displeasure of Sanballat and Tobiah was expressed, in 2:19-20 contempt and accusations are uttered towards Nehemiah's plan by these three men. Williamson suggests that while Sanballat and Tobiah have "personal vested interests in the affair" (cf. v. 10), it is not clear while Geshem is hostile towards Nehemiah.[22]

Neh. 3: Sanballat becomes very indignant and mock the Judeans

The building of the wall and the city starts, and a detailed list of individuals and groups who participate is given (3:1-32). The initiative is taken by Eliashib the high priest (v. 1).[23] While most of those participating in the rebuilding are identified by family or geographical affiliations, some are related by their profession. (Only the elders of Tekoa are refusing to help, cf. v. 5). The list might be parted in two: vv. 1-15 and vv. 16-32. While the first part describes the rebuilding of the former wall, identified by its gates and such features, the second depicts a new direction of the wall, with local landmarks as orientation points.[24]

Neh. 3:33-35:

33 וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר שָׁמַע סַנְבַלַּט כִּי־אֲנַחְנוּ בוֹנִים אֶת־הַחוֹמָה
וַיִּחַר לוֹ וַיְכַעֵס הַרְבֵּה וַיַּלְעֵג עַל־הַיְהוּדִים׃ 34 וַיֹּאמֶר לִפְנֵי
אֶחָיו וְחֵיל שֹׁמְרוֹן וַיֹּאמֶר מָה הַיְהוּדִים הָאֻמְלָלִים עֹשִׂים
הֲיַעַזְבוּ לָהֶם הֲיִזְבָּחוּ הֲיְכַלּוּ בַיּוֹם הֲיְחַיּוּ אֶת־הָאֲבָנִים

[21] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, pp. 192-193 (quotation taken from p. 193): חֵלֶק "share" (physical [metaphorical] stake), צְדָקָה "right" (legal claims) and זִכָּרוֹן "traditional claim" (with cultic associations, related to a denial participation in the cult, cf. Ezra 4:3). Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, p. 43, wonders whether the expression that Sanballat and his associates have no "portion, legal claim or memorial" in Jerusalem may be "an allusion to a former authority over the city or perhaps to the fact that Sanballat was actually also a worshipper of Yhwh". Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, p. 79, finds a striking similarity between Ezra 4:1-5 and Neh. 2:19-20 with their exclusion of opponents from participation in the building of temple and wall respectively, cf. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, p. 226.
[22] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, p. 192.
[23] The high priest Eliashib: 3:20-21, 12:10;22, 13:28. He is grandson of Jeshua (12:10-11). A grandson of the high priest Eliashib had married a daughter of Sanballat, in 13:28. The high priest Eliashib participated in the building of the wall (3:1;20;21). In 13:4 the priest Eliashib and Tobiah are presented as relatives. Eliashib offered Tobiah a place in the storeroom of the temple (v. 5), making Nehemiah angry (v. 8), treated below.
[24] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, p. 200.

מֵעֲרֵמוֹת הֶעָפָר וְהֵמָּה שְׂרוּפוֹת׃
35 וְטוֹבִיָּה הָעַמּוֹנִי אֶצְלוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר גַּם אֲשֶׁר־הֵם בּוֹנִים
אִם־יַעֲלֶה שׁוּעָל וּפָרַץ חוֹמַת אַבְנֵיהֶם׃

3:33. When Sanballat heard that we were building the wall he became angry and was very indignant. He mocked the Judeans, 34. saying in front of his brothers and the Samarian army: What are those feeble Judeans doing? Will they leave it to God[25], sacrifice and complete in one day? Can they raise these stones to life from the dust heaps, burnt as they are? 35. Tobiah the Ammonite, who was together with him, said: That stone wall they try to build, if a fox climbs it, he will break it.

When Sanballat hears that the building of the wall has begun, he becomes angry and scorns הַיְהוּדִים in front of his allies and the army of Samaria (vv. 33-34). In five mocking questions he is contrasting the weakness of הַיְהוּדִים with the huge task they have set forth to accomplish: rebuilding the walls and gates of Jerusalem. Sanballat refers to Nehemiah and his associates as הַיְהוּדִים while at the same time dissociates himself from them (vv. 33-34).[26] His opposition is supported by Tobiah the Ammonite (v. 35), who adds a joke to his scorn.

Sanballat's negative reactions to the ongoing building of the walls and gates of Jerusalem are stronger here than in 2:10;19, perhaps because the work has really started, and is not anymore on a level of being planned only. After having become very annoyed (2:10) and deriding Nehemiah and his allies (2:19), Sanballat and his allies now try to intimidate the Judeans (3:33-35).

Nehemiah responds by a prayer to "our God" (3:36).[27] He begs the reproach of Sanballat and his allies being turned back to them. Nehemiah wishes the opponents to be delivered up לְבִזָּה בְּאֶרֶץ שִׁבְיָה "as plunder in a land of captivity". He is cursing the opponents because of their sin and guilt towards "our God", asking them not to be forgiven for provoking YHWH's anger in front of the builders (vv. 36-37). The call for revenge on the enemies might be relate to the stereotypical language of the psalms of lament.[28] Knoppers argues that when Nehemiah is praying to YHWH not to blot out the sins of Sanballat and Tobiah, he might take for granted that they are praying to the same deity as him. Moreover, he uses this as an argument that Nehemiah is accepting Sanballat and Tobiah as YHWH-worshippers.[29] The wall becomes built to half its height (v. 38).

[25] עזב "leave" ("commit to") (עזב II repair). לָהֶם is taken to be a Tiq Soph (cf. 1 Sam. 3:13), emended to אֱלֹהִים.
[26] Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, p. 223.
[27] Prayers: 3:36, 5:19, 6:9;14, 13:14;22;31, 9. Appeal to God to remember him and hear his prayer: 5:19, 13:14;22;29;31, cf. 6:9;14.
[28] Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, pp. 244-245.
[29] Knoppers, "Nehemiah and Sanballat", pp. 329-330.

Neh. 4:1-5: Sanballat and his allies conspire against Jerusalem

4:1 וַיְהִי כַאֲשֶׁר שָׁמַע סַנְבַלַּט וְטוֹבִיָּה וְהָעַרְבִים
וְהָעַמֹּנִים וְהָאַשְׁדּוֹדִים כִּי־עָלְתָה אֲרוּכָה לְחֹמוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם
כִּי־הֵחֵלּוּ הַפְּרָצִים לְהִסָּתֵם וַיִּחַר לָהֶם מְאֹד׃[2] וַיִּקְשְׁרוּ כֻלָּם
יַחְדָּו לָבוֹא לְהִלָּחֶם בִּירוּשָׁלַם וְלַעֲשׂוֹת לוֹ תוֹעָה׃
[3] וַנִּתְפַּלֵּל אֶל־אֱלֹהֵינוּ וַנָּעֶמֶד מִשְׁמָר עֲלֵיהֶם יוֹמָם וָלָיְלָה מִפְּנֵיהֶם׃
[4] וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה כָּשַׁל כֹּחַ הַסַּבָּל וְהֶעָפָר הַרְבֵּה וַאֲנַחְנוּ לֹא
נוּכַל לִבְנוֹת בַּחוֹמָה׃
[5] וַיֹּאמְרוּ צָרֵינוּ לֹא יֵדְעוּ וְלֹא יִרְאוּ עַד אֲשֶׁר־נָבוֹא
אֶל־תּוֹכָם וַהֲרַגְנוּם וְהִשְׁבַּתְנוּ אֶת־הַמְּלָאכָה׃

4:1. When Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the Ashodites, heard that the restoration[30] of the walls of Jerusalem was going ahead (and) that the parts which had been broken down were beginning to be filled, they became very angry. 2. So they all conspired together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion (to it), 3. but we prayed to our God and set up a wathc over them day and night. 4. Judah said: The strength of basket-carriers is failing and there is so much rubble. We are not able ourselves to rebuild the wall. 5. Our adversaries said: Before they know or see it, we shall come among them and kill them and so make work stop.

The opposition between the workers and the enemies in the area becomes intensified. When Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, Ammonites and Ashdodites hear that the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem progresses, they become very angry (4:1). As they did not succeed with their intimidation (3:33-35), they now try to obstruct the rebuilding. They conspire to launch a surprise attack against the workers on the wall (4:2;5). Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, Ammonites and Ashdodites are outsiders and צָרֵינוּ "our adversaries": Sanballat is associated with the north,[31] the Arabs (represented by Geshem in 2:19 and 6:1[32]) belong to the south, while the Ammonites (represented by Tobiah in 2:10;19 and 3:35[33]) are from the east and the Ashodites from the west. Nehemiah prays to "our God" and puts guards on the walls (v. 3). In the *qinah* form Judah expresses the despair of the community and its ability to rebuild the wall (v. 4).

In v. 6 הַיְּהוּדִים living together with the adversaries are quoted when they tell how they are surrounded by opponents.[34] Nehemiah puts armed guards at the lowest

[30] אֲרוּכָה "healing"
[31] On Sanballat, see nn. 4 and 13.
[32] On Geshem, see nn. 4 and 20.
[33] On Tobiah, see nn. 4 and 14.
[34] 4:6 seems to be corrupt, lit.: "when the Judeans who were living near them came to us, they said to us ten times, 'from all the places which you will return to us'. Although recognising the difficulties and corruption of the verse, S. Japhet, "People and Land in the Restoration Period" in S. Japhet, *From the Rivers of Babylon to the Highlands of Judah: Collected Studies on the Restoration Period* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006) 110, reads הַיְּהוּדִים הַיּשְׁבִים אצלם "the Jews who lived by them" as a possible reference to those who remained in the land, that is, "'Judeans' settled in the areas of those mentioned beforehand, namely Sanballat (in Samaria), Tobiah (in Ammon), the Arabs, Ammonites and Ashdodites". Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, p. 223, explains how in Neh. 4:6 and 5:8 a shift appears

points behind the wall (v. 7). The enemies have heard that their plans had been made known for Nehemiah and his people and that God had hindered them (v. 9). 4:9 becomes a variation of a pattern: "When our enemies heard that all was known to us…"[35] In this case, all opposition has failed and Nehemiah and his people can continue without hindrances. The people turn back to continue the building of the wall, where half of them were working and the other half were armed to protect towards the enemies, and where officers were behind כָּל־בֵּית יְהוּדָה "all the house of Judah" (vv. 9-10). Also, the workers are equipped with weapons (vv. 10-17). Blenkinsopp describes the unfolding of the conflicts as patterned according to a holy war-tradition:

> [E]nemies conspire together, the people call to God for help, then human resources are limited, they form battle lines according to the ancient tribal levy, they are urged not to fear since God will fight for them, and finally the enemy's plans are frustrated.[36]

Neh. 6:1-9: Sanballat and his allies try to destroy Nehemiah

6:1 וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁמַע לְסַנְבַלַּט וְטוֹבִיָּה וּלְגֶשֶׁם
הָעַרְבִי וּלְיֶתֶר אֹיְבֵינוּ כִּי בָנִיתִי אֶת־הַחוֹמָה וְלֹא־נוֹתַר בָּהּ
פָּרֶץ גַּם עַד־הָעֵת הַהִיא דְּלָתוֹת לֹא־הֶעֱמַדְתִּי בַּשְּׁעָרִים׃
[2] וַיִּשְׁלַח סַנְבַלַּט וְגֶשֶׁם אֵלַי לֵאמֹר לְכָה וְנִוָּעֲדָה יַחְדָּו
בַּכְּפִירִים בְּבִקְעַת אוֹנוֹ וְהֵמָּה חֹשְׁבִים לַעֲשׂוֹת לִי רָעָה׃
[3] וָאֶשְׁלְחָה עֲלֵיהֶם מַלְאָכִים לֵאמֹר מְלָאכָה גְדוֹלָה אֲנִי
עֹשֶׂה וְלֹא אוּכַל לָרֶדֶת לָמָּה תִשְׁבֹּת הַמְּלָאכָה כַּאֲשֶׁר
אַרְפֶּהָ וְיָרַדְתִּי אֲלֵיכֶם׃
[4] וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ אֵלַי כַּדָּבָר הַזֶּה אַרְבַּע פְּעָמִים וָאָשִׁיב אוֹתָם
כַּדָּבָר הַזֶּה׃
[5] וַיִּשְׁלַח אֵלַי סַנְבַלַּט כַּדָּבָר הַזֶּה פַּעַם חֲמִישִׁית אֶת־נַעֲרוֹ
וְאִגֶּרֶת פְּתוּחָה בְּיָדוֹ׃
[6] כָּתוּב בָּהּ בַּגּוֹיִם נִשְׁמָע וְגַשְׁמוּ אֹמֵר אַתָּה וְהַיְּהוּדִים
חֹשְׁבִים לְמָרוֹד עַל־כֵּן אַתָּה בוֹנֶה הַחוֹמָה וְאַתָּה הִוֶּה לָהֶם
לְמֶלֶךְ כַּדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה׃
[7] וְגַם־נְבִיאִים הֶעֱמַדְתָּ לְקָרֹא עָלֶיךָ בִּירוּשָׁלַם לֵאמֹר מֶלֶךְ
בִּיהוּדָה וְעַתָּה יִשָּׁמַע לַמֶּלֶךְ כַּדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וְעַתָּה לְכָה
וְנִוָּעֲצָה יַחְדָּו׃
[8] וָאֶשְׁלְחָה אֵלָיו לֵאמֹר לֹא נִהְיָה כַּדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר
אַתָּה אוֹמֵר כִּי מִלִּבְּךָ אַתָּה בוֹדֶאם׃
[9] כִּי כֻלָּם מְיָרְאִים אוֹתָנוּ לֵאמֹר יִרְפּוּ יְדֵיהֶם מִן־הַמְּלָאכָה
וְלֹא תֵעָשֶׂה וְעַתָּה חַזֵּק אֶת־יָדָי׃

from territorial to ethnic sense with religious overtones, especially with reference to the people of Judean origin living outside the province.
[35] Cf. p. 13 below.
[36] Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, p. 223.

6:1. Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall and that no break remained in it, though up to now I had not hung the doors in their gates. 2. Sanballat and Geshem sent a message to me, saying, “Come, let us meet in Chephirim in the Ono Valley.” They were planning to do me harm, 3. so I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am engaged in great tasks; I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it to come down to you?” 4. They sent me the same message four times, and I gave them the same answer. 5. Sanballat sent me the same message a fifth time by his servant, now in an open letter. 6. In it was written: “It is reported among the nations, and Gashmu also is saying it, that you and the Judeans are planning to rebel – for this reason you are rebuilding the wall – and that you are to be their king, 7. and you have even set up prophets to proclaim about you in Jerusalem, saying, ‘There is a king in Judah!’. Now, the king will hear these reports. Come, therefore, let us confer together.” 8. I sent him a reply saying, “None of the things of which you speak has happened; you are inventing them in your own mind.” 9. They were all trying to intimidate us, thinking, “Their hands will drop from the work so that it will not be finished.” But I strengthened my hands the more.

After some internal conditions to be sorted out in Neh. 5, the story of the building of the wall continues in Neh. 6. Nehemiah’s adversaries, here identified as “Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies”, hear that the wall is now almost finished: the breaches are all repaired to full heights and the only that remains is to set up the doors of the gates (v. 1). As they did neither succeed with their intimidation (3:33-35) nor to obstruct the rebuilding (4:1-5), the enemies of Nehemiah now try to destroy him. Sanballat and Tobiah send a message to Nehemiah to meet them in Chephirim (v. 2). He knows they are going to hurt him, and replies by messengers that he is too busy with an important task (v. 3). He receives the same message four times and answers the same every time (v. 4). For the fifth time Sanballat sends the message, this time by a messenger with an open letter (v. 5). In this letter, he tells that he has heard rumours that Nehemiah and the Judeans are planning to rebel by rebuilding the wall and making Nehemiah king. Sanballat reports that he has got these news from הַגּוֹיִם “the nations” (v. 6).[37] He further claims that Nehemiah’s plan is supported by prophets (v. 7). The king will get to know about this, and Sanballat and his men want to discuss the matters with Nehemiah. Nehemiah replies that this is only made up by Sanballat (v. 8). He thinks that they just want to frighten them so that they shall not fulfil the restoration – and he prays to the deity to strengthen his hands (v. 9).

Since Nehemiah’s adversaries did not succeed with this meeting in the Ono Vally, they try to humiliate him by getting him inside the temple: Nehemiah goes to visit Shemaiah, son of Delaiah, son Mehetabel, who, by uttering a prophecy, suggests

[37] Knoppers, “Nehemiah and Sanballat”, p. 328, comments how הַגּוֹיִם “the nations” here appear as a collective third group, in which Sanballat does not belong, and so Sanballat refers to הַגּוֹיִם “the nations” similar to how Nehemiah does, that is, it might express Nehemiah and Sanballat as “us” towards the “other people”.

that Nehemiah seeks refuge in the temple because his adversaries want to kill him (v. 10). But he refuses; he cannot go into the temple, presumably because he’s not a priest (v. 11). Also, he realises that this Shemaiah is not a man of God, but has been paid by his enemies Sanballat and Tobiah, so that he should do something foolish and gain a bad reputation (vv. 12-13). Nehemiah calls on his God to punish Tobiah, Sanballat, the prophetess Noadiah and other prophets who tried to frighten him (v. 14). For some reason Shemaiah is not mentioned by name in this call for revenge.

Since the enemies of Nehemiah did not succeed with their obstruction of the rebuilding of the wall (4:1-5), they conspire against him, trying to eliminate him, but also this fails. Despite all this opposition, the wall was finished on the 25th of Elul, after 52 days (6:15), in front of כָּל־אוֹיְבֵינוּ “all the enemies” and כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר סְבִיבֹתֵינוּ “all the peoples surrounding”, who realised that the restoration was supported by their God (v. 16).

6:17-19: Tobiah and his allies

17 גַּם בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם מַרְבִּים חֹרֵי יְהוּדָה אִגְּרֹתֵיהֶם הוֹלְכוֹת
עַל־טוֹבִיָּה וַאֲשֶׁר לְטוֹבִיָּה בָּאוֹת אֲלֵיהֶם׃
18 כִּי־רַבִּים בִּיהוּדָה בַּעֲלֵי שְׁבוּעָה לוֹ כִּי־חָתָן הוּא
לִשְׁכַנְיָה בֶן־אָרַח וִיהוֹחָנָן בְּנוֹ לָקַח אֶת־בַּת־מְשֻׁלָּם בֶּן בֶּרֶכְיָה׃
19 גַּם טוֹבְיָּה יָהִיו אֹמְרִים לְפָנַי וּדְבָרַי הָיוּ מוֹצִיאִים לוֹ
אִגְּרוֹת שָׁלַח טוֹבִיָּה לְיָרְאֵנִי׃

6:17. Also, in those days the nobles of Judah were sending many letters to Tobiah and Tobiah’s letters were coming to them, 18. for many in Judah were his sworn allies to him since he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah[38], son of Arah, and his son Jonathan had married the daughter of Meshullam, son of Berechiah. 19. They also spoke well to me about his good deeds and then reporting my words back to him. Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me.

The leaders in Judah send many letters to Tobiah, in which he responds (v. 17). Many in Judah had ties to him, as both he and his son had married Judean women (v. 18). Tobiah was the son-in-law of Shechaniah, son of Arah (mentioned as one of the families in the list of returnees in Neh. 7:10/Ezra 2:5)[39], while his son Jonathan had married the daughter of Meshullam, son of Berechiah (Meshullam is mentioned in the list of builders in Neh. 3:4;30 and among the heads of the people who signed the pledge in 10:21-22 [incl. also his grandfather Meshezabel]). Thus, Tobiah has good family ties, which were fastened by marriages. Knoppers comments that Nehemiah

[38] Some MSS read Shebaniah. Neh. 3:39: list of builders, mentiones Shemaiah, son of Shecaniah.
[39] In 13:4 Sanballat is also called a relative of Eliashib, see more below.

does not act against Tobiah's marriage; perhaps of strategic reasons because he realises that Tobiah had relations to his own allies.[40] חֹרֵי יְהוּדָה "the nobles of Judah" continue to speak well about Tobiah, and he responds by writing letters to intimidate Nehemiah (v. 19). Thus, Judeans who participated in the restoration do not necessarily support Nehemiah in other matters; his enemies had close ties with his allies.[41]

In Neh. 6, the walls are completed (v. 15) despite what might look like opposition both from outside (Sanballat, Tobiah and the surrounding peoples) as well as from inside (the prophetess Noadiah and other prophets, v. 14, and also the nobles of Judah).

Williamson suggests a literary pattern where every step in the building project is followed by a reference to the opposition from Sanballat and his allies. This structure consists of variations of the phrase "When X heard…" in relation to the opposition (2:10;19, 3:33, 4:1;9, 5:6, 6:1;16) as well as the "Remember!"-formula.[42] 2:10 and v. 19 convey identical formulations in relation to the plans of rebuilding.[43] The pattern from Neh. 2 continues when it comes to the very building and becomes expanded as regards Nehemiah's response to the opposition: while in 2:10 no response is mentioned, in 20:20 Nehemiah responds by assuring that they will succeed by the support of "the God of heaven" and in 3:36-37 he prays that those who mock him and his people must be revenged by plundering and exile, and not be forgiven. Also in chapter 4 the adversaries fail and Nehemiah and his people can continue their work, now equipped with weapons (4:7;10-17). Also the enemies' attempt to eliminate Nehemiah in chapter 6 fails. Despite all this opposition, the wall was finishe (6:15), in front of כָּל־אוֹיְבֵינוּ "all the enemies" and כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר סְבִיבֹתֵינוּ "all the peoples surrounding", who realised that the restoration was supported by their God (v. 16). This literary structure mirrors the growing intensity of the conflict, where Nehemiah uses increasing measures in handling this opposition.[44]

[40] Knoppers, "Nehemiah and Sanballat", p. 324.
[41] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah,* p. 261 and Knoppers, "Nehemiah and Sanballat", p. 324.
[42] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, p. 251.
[43] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, p. 215.
[44] Also Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, p. 243, comments on this structural and stereotypical element in Neh. 2:10-6:16. He further depicts the pattern of Neh. 1-6 as close to that of the psalms of lamentations:

Neh. 13

The law of Moses is read for the people, where it is said that no Ammonite or Moabite are admitted to קְהַל הָאֱלֹהִים "the congregation of God" (13:1, cf. Deutr. 23:4-7) and the people separate כָּל־עֵרֶב "all of mixed descent" from Israel (v. 3). Strategies of exclusion are here related to denial of participation in the cult and community.[45]

Neh. 13:4-9: Tobiah becomes expelled from the storeroom of the Temple

4 וְלִפְנֵי מִזֶּה אֶלְיָשִׁיב הַכֹּהֵן נָתוּן בְּלִשְׁכַּת בֵּית־אֱלֹהֵינוּ קָרוֹב לְטוֹבִיָּה׃
5 וַיַּעַשׂ לוֹ לִשְׁכָּה גְדוֹלָה וְשָׁם הָיוּ לְפָנִים נֹתְנִים אֶת־הַמִּנְחָה
הַלְּבוֹנָה וְהַכֵּלִים וּמַעְשַׂר הַדָּגָן הַתִּירוֹשׁ וְהַיִּצְהָר מִצְוַת
הַלְוִיִּם וְהַמְשֹׁרְרִים וְהַשֹּׁעֲרִים וּתְרוּמַת הַכֹּהֲנִים׃
6 וּבְכָל־זֶה לֹא הָיִיתִי בִּירוּשָׁלִָם כִּי בִּשְׁנַת שְׁלֹשִׁים וּשְׁתַּיִם
לְאַרְתַּחְשַׁסְתְּא מֶלֶךְ־בָּבֶל בָּאתִי אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ וּלְקֵץ יָמִים
נִשְׁאַלְתִּי מִן־הַמֶּלֶךְ׃
7 וָאָבוֹא לִירוּשָׁלִָם וָאָבִינָה בָּרָעָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֶלְיָשִׁיב
לְטוֹבִיָּה לַעֲשׂוֹת לוֹ לִשְׁכָּה בְּחַצְרֵי בֵּית הָאֱלֹהִים׃
8 וַיֵּרַע לִי מְאֹד וָאַשְׁלִיכָה אֶת־כָּל־כְּלֵי בֵית־טוֹבִיָּה הַחוּץ
מִן־הַלִּשְׁכָּה׃
9 וָאֹמְרָה וַיִּטַהֲרוּ הַלְּשָׁכוֹת וָאָשִׁיבָה שָׁם כְּלֵי בֵית הָאֱלֹהִים
אֶת־הַמִּנְחָה וְהַלְּבוֹנָה׃

13:4. Earlier, Eliashib the priest, who had been appointed over the rooms in the House of our God and a relative of Tobiah, 5. had assigned to him a large storeroom where they used to store the meal offering, the incense, the vessels, the tithes of grain, wine and oil as prescribed for the Levites, singers and gatekeepers, and the portions for the priests. 6. During all this time, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes, king of Babylon, I went to the king, and only after a while did I ask leave of the king. 7 and I came back to Jerusalem and I learned of the evil that Eliashib had done on behalf of Tobiah in assigning him a room in the courts of the house of God. 8. I was very angry, and threw all the household goods of Tobiah out of the room. 9. I gave orders to purify the rooms, and had the vessels of the House of God and the meal offering and the incense put back.

Eliashib the priest has made available one of the storerooms in the temple for Tobiah to use (vv. 4-5). Eliashib is presented as קָרוֹב "a relative" of Tobiah, who is not called Ammonite here.[46] This happened when Nehemiah is away in Babylon reporting to the king (v. 6). When he arrives in Jerusalem, he learns that Eliashib has assigned this place to Tobiah, Nehemiah's opponent (v. 7). Nehemiah dislikes this very much and

"hostile accusation or action against an innocent party who counters with trustful prayer to God and thus overcomes (e.g., Pss 7;9;54;56;59). The comparison may help to explain some features of the genre in which the NM is cast, and should be borne in mind in evaluating the historical character of his *apologia*" (p. 225).
[45] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, p. 380, sees the theme of the use of the temple chambers as uniting 12:44-13:14.
[46] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, p. 386, and Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, pp. 353-354, do not regard this Eliashib as the high priest Eliashib mentioned in 3:1;20-21, 12:10, 13:28, while Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, p. 65, thinks it is one and the same. On Eliashib, see also n. 23.

expels Tobiah and his belongings from the temple room (v. 8), purifies the room and restores it to its proper use (v. 9). The storeroom in the temple is for holy objects and tithes. Tobiah and his belongings have to be removed because his presence is regarded as ritually defiling the room he occupies. Both Olyan and Albertz argue that Nehemiah's command that the room be purified presupposes the view that alienage was in and of itself ritually defiling.[47] What is at stake is ritual impurity. It is not said that Tobiah has failed to observe any purity rules that should qualify any purification. He is not accused for any moral "abomination" (and Tobiah himself is a Yhwh-worshipper?). It is the Judean community, represented with Eliashib the priest, who has failed to uphold the boundaries of the temple and also fraternizing with the enemy. The cause of the pollution is alienage. Tobiah is a perpetual polluter, a threat to the holiness of the sanctuary and presumably, the community. [48]

Neh. 13:28:

[28] וּמִבְּנֵי יוֹיָדָע בֶּן־אֶלְיָשִׁיב הַכֹּהֵן הַגָּדוֹל חָתָן לְסַנְבַלַּט הַחֹרֹנִי וָאַבְרִיחֵהוּ מֵעָלָי׃

13:28. One of the sons of Joiada son of the high priest Eliashib was a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; I drove him away from me.

A grandson of Eliashib the hight priest had married a daughter of Sanballat the Horonite, and for this he becomes expelled by Nehemiah. Then Nehemiah again prays to his God, asking the deity to remember them for having defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priests and the Levites (v. 29, cf. Lev. 21:13-15). Nehemiah separated his people מִכָּל־נֵכָר "from anything foreign" (v. 30, cf. v. 3). Nehemiah. Knoppers comments how Sanballat seems to have no religious issue in that his daughter married a descendant of the high priest Eliashib, maybe bonding south/north alliance?[49] According to Olyan, Nehemiah presents the marriage of the son of Joiada, son of the high-priest Eliashib, with the daughter of Sanballat as a defilement of the

[47] S. Olyan, "Purity Ideology in Ezra-Nehemiah as a Tool to Reconstitute the Community", *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 35 (2004) 4 and R. Albertz, "Purity Strategies ans Political Interests in the Policy of Nehemiah" in S. Gitin, J.E. Wright, J.P. Dessel (eds.), *Confronting the Past: Archaeological and Historical Essay on Ancient Israel in Honor of William G. Dever* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006) 199-206. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, pp. 362-363, speaks about "ritual ethnicity" in this regard.
[48] Olyan, "Purity Ideology in Ezra-Nehemiah as a Tool to Reconstitute the Community", p. 4.
[49] Knoppers, "Nehemiah and Sanballat", p. 327.

priestly bloodline. This has to be punished and atoned for, unless future generations of the priestly lineage shall become contaminated.[50]

Judah/Israel

In the book of Nehemiah, lots of identity markers appear, where Israel becomes differentiated in various ways. In a treatment of competing assumptions about identity in Achaemenid Yehud, Berquist emphasises how texts from this time recognize identity as "unclear, inconsistent, and always contested".[51] He questions the assumptions which underlie the use of terms such as Judeans, Jews, Yehudites, Jerusalemites, הַגּוֹלָה, and others to describe the population of Persian Yehud. Berquist examines the way that multiple forces shape identity, including ethnic, religious and political processes. The Yehudite society became an amalgamation of divergent forms and structures in which the various centres of power forced identity into hybridity. An interplay of forces appears in identity formation, where we have seen how, for instance, both Nehemiah, Sanballat and Tobiah might have overlapping and multiple collective identities.[52] In the discussion of the relation of Nehemiah to his allies and adversaries, Knoppers emphasises the importance of seeing this debate in a broader frame, that is, it is not only a debate about Judean identity but also about Israelite identity.[53]

Conclusions

The community of Judah is neither self-enclosed, independent nor self-sufficient. Both Nehemiah and Tobiah, for instance, have double loyalities, working for the Persian administration and Judean interests. Also, Nehemiah and Sanballat might

[50] Olyan, "Purity Ideology in Ezra-Nehemiah as a Tool to Reconstitute the Community", pp. 4-10. When in Ezra 4:2 the descendants of foreigners forcibly resettled in the region of Samaria in the late eight century argue to Zerubbabel and Jeshua that they worshipped to the same God as their Judean neighbours, this might be related to Sanballat, governor in Samaria, who had close contacts with the high priestly family in Jerusalem (Neh. 13:28) and was himself a worshipper of YHWH.
[51] J.L. Berquist, "Constructions of Identity in Postcolonial Yehud" in O. Lipschits and M. Oeming (eds.), *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006) 55.
[52] On the variety of definitions of Judah and Israel in the Persian Period, see also P.R. Davies, "Exile? What Exile? Whose Exile?" in L. L. Grabbe (ed*.), Leading Captivity Captive: 'The Exile' as History and Ideology* (JSOTSup, 278; Sheffield, 1998) 128-138, E. Ben Zvi, "Inclusion and Exclusion from Israel as conveyed by the Use of the Term I'srael' in Post-Monarchical Biblical Texts" in S.W. Holloway and L.K. Handy (eds.), *The Pitcher is Broken: Memorial Essay for Gösta W. Ahlström* (Sheffield, 1995) 95-149, Bedford, "Diaspora", p. 149.
[53] Knoppers, "Nehemiah and Sanballat", pp. 320;322.

belong to different geographical areas (tribes) and simultaneously share some common attributes (religion, institutions, ancestor (Jacob)).

In this situation of boundary and identity maintenance, an approach based on a dichotomy of two clear cut parties tends to be reductionistic. We are obviously dealing with subtle cultural transformations and political enfranchisement with fluid boundaries and competing definitions. The book of Nehemiah illustrates how historical circumstances contribute to the shaping of tradition, which again serves to construct identity.[54] In this process of identity formation, "shared" traditions, social structures, religious institutions, and so on are central ingredients.[55] Knoppers emphasises how the book of Nehemiah convey signs of internal resistance to and subversion of initiatives taken by the Judean leaders appear.[56] This shows that collective identities and boundaries are not stable, uniform and singular.[57]

Literature

Albertz, R., "Purity Strategies and Political Interests in the Policy of Nehemiah" in S. Gitin, J.P. Wright and J.P. Dessel (eds.), *Confronting the Past: Archaeological and Historical Essay on Ancient Israel in Honor of William G. Dever* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006) 199-206.

Becking, B., "Ezra's Re-Enactment of the Exile" in L.L. Grabbe (ed.), *Leading Captivity Captive: 'The Exile' as History and Ideology* (JSOTSup, 278= European Seminar in Historical Methodology, 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 40-61.

Bedford, P., "Diaspora: Homeland Relations in Ezra-Nehemiah", VT 52 (2002) 147-165.

Ben Zvi, E., "Inclusion and Exclusion from Israel as conveyed by the Use of the Term I'srael' in Post-Monarchical Biblical Texts" in S.W. Holloway and L.K. Handy (eds.), *The Pitcher is Broken: Memorial Essay for Gösta W. Ahlström* (Sheffield, 1995) 95-149.

Berquist, J.L., "Constructions of Identity in Postcolonial Yehud" in O. Lipschits and M. Oeming, M., (eds.), *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006) 53-66.

Blenkinsopp, J., *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1988).

Cohen, M., "Leave Nehemiah Alone: Nehemiah's 'Tales' and Fifth-Century BCE Historiography" in M.J. Boda and P.L. Redditt (eds.), *Unity and Disunity in Ezra and Nehemiah: Redaction Rhetoric, and Reader* (Hebrew Bible Monographs, 17; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008) 55-74.

[54] J. Kessler, "The Diaspora in Zechariah 1-8 and Ezra-Nehemiah: The Role of History, Social Location, and Tradition in the Formulation of Identity" in G.N. Knoppers and K.A. Ristau (eds.), *Community Identity in Judean Historiography: Biblical and Comparative Perspectives* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009) 145.
[55] Knoppers, "Ethnicity, Genealogy, Geography, and Change: The Judean Communities of Babylon and Jerusalem in the Story of Ezra" in Knoppers and Ristau, *Community Identity in Judean Historiography*, p. 157. He further refers to S.J.D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) 1-10 and Berquist, "Constructions of Identity in Postcolonial Yehud".
[56] See n. 2.
[57] Knoppers, "Nehemiah and Sanballat", p. 316.

Cohen, S.J.D., *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

Davies, P.R., "Exile? What Exile? Whose Exile?" in L.L. Grabbe (ed*.), Leading Captivity Captive: 'The Exile' as History and Ideology* (JSOTSup, 278; Sheffield, 1998) 128-138.

Eskenazi, T.C., *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah* (SBLMS, 36; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).
Japhet, S., "People and Land in the Restoration Period" in S. Japhet, *From the Rivers of Babylon to the Highlands of Judah: Collected Studies on the Restoration Period* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006) 96-116. First published in G. Strecker (ed.), *Das Land Israel in biblischer Zeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983).

Kessler, J., "The Diaspora in Zechariah 1-8 and Ezra-Nehemiah: The Role of History, Social Location, and Tradition in the Formulation of Identity" in G.N. Knoppers and K.A. Ristau (eds*.), Community Identity in Judean Historiography: Biblical and Comparative Perspectives* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009) 119-145.

Knoppers, "Ethnicity, Genealogy, Geography, and Change: The Judean Communities of Babylon and Jerusalem in the Story of Ezra" in G.N. Knoppers and K.A. Ristau (eds.), *Community Identity in Judean Historiography: Biblical and Comparative Perspectives* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009) 147-171.

Knoppers, G.N., "Nehemiah and Sanballat: The Enemy Without or Within?" in O. Lipschits, G.N. Knoppers and R. Albertz (eds.), *Judah and the Judeans in the Fourth Century B.C.E.* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007) 305-331.

Kraemer, D., "On the Relationship of the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah", *JSOT* 59 (1993) 73-93.

Olyan, S., "Purity Ideology in Ezra-Nehemiah as a Tool to Reconstitute the Community", *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 35 (2004) 1-16.

VanderKam, J.C., "Ezra-Nehemiah or Ezra and Nehemiah" in E. Ulrich, J.W. Wright, R.P. Carroll and P.R. Davies (eds.), *Priests, Prophets, and Scribes: Essays in the Formation and Heritage of Second Temple Judaism in Honour of Joseph Blenkinsopp* (JSOTSup, 149; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992) 55-76.

Williamson, H.G.M., *Ezra, Nehemiah* (WBC, 16: Waco, TX: World Books, 1985).

Wright, J.L., *Rebuilding Identity: The Nehemiah-Memoir and its Earliest Readers* (BZAW, 348; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004).