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"The Cap'n Crunch Effect": A Response to Blaire French's Essay

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Four years ago, a colleague of mine and I were discussing, of all things, the familiar breakfast cereal character Cap'n Crunch. My colleague remarked that the character's full name was Horatio Magellan Crunch; I had never heard this before and was skeptical, but my colleague was steadfast in his assertion and claimed that he had known this fact ever since he was a child. A few moments later, we conducted an internet search, and indeed he was correct – according to all reliable sources (including the website of the cereal manufacturer's parent company) the character's full name was Horatio Magellan Crunch. But what he did not anticipate was the fact that this name was first introduced to the public as part of an advertising campaign only 4 years earlier…well into my colleague's adulthood (he was, in fact, in his 30s when this campaign was launched).

Our online discovery provided us with an opportunity to consider what had led to my colleague's earlier belief that he had always known Cap'n Crunch's full name. He had constructed a memory where this new information was categorized as part of his childhood encounter with Cap'n Crunch breakfast cereal. His perception of the character and the

narrative surrounding him, his name, and perhaps what this suggests about his crunchy maritime adventures was factored into his sense of personal history and identity; it was not an accurate reflection of a sequence of events in an actual, linear history. Cap'n Crunch was not a symbol of his role and experience as a scholar, as a graduate student, or even as an adolescent (though he remained a fan of the cereal throughout those various periods in his life). Rather, Cap'n Crunch was a symbol of his early childhood, a character who factored into a network of formative events bound to the late 1970s-early 1980s that shaped his sensibilities and values well into later decades. The information from the new ad campaign was thus most meaningfully categorized in this earlier time in his life as well, despite the fact that he could only have encountered the good captain's full name as an adult.

Without pushing the issue too far, this otherwise frivolous anecdote sheds much light on the issue of memory construction as it relates to how the texts of the Hebrew Bible reflect, preserve, and certainly shape Judaism's ancient history. In recent decades, it has become clear that everything preserved in our extant versions of the Hebrew Bible is, in some way, a reflection upon a remembered past rather than an actual past.[1] This does not mean that the historiographic, liturgical, prophetic, and sapiential materials enshrined in the Hebrew Bible are disconnected from an experienced history or cannot be used as a resource for reconstructing the past. Only the most skeptical of scholars would discount these texts as useful tools for such an enterprise; most scholars, to one degree or another, see biblical texts as extremely valuable windows into the history of their authors and audiences. But these texts have not only been shaped through generations of scribal transmission, they also largely arose from writers who textualized works long preserved on the oral level.[2] Even if these works emerge from historical events, they are not

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[1] For a full treatment of this issue, see the collection of essays in Diana V. Edelman & Ehud ben Zvi (eds.), *Remembering Biblical Figures in the Late Persian & Early Hellenistic Periods: Social Memory and Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[2] On the nature of scribal transmission and the complex oral-textual dynamic involved in this process, see now David M. Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction,*

eye-witness journalistic accounts of those events but, rather, retrospective evaluations. Time, no matter how brief the span, separated the composition of materials from the circumstances they reflect, and that reflection is hardly ever uninflected. From this angle of view, all biblical texts are, in essence, constructed memories, even if we wish to date them as nearly contemporaneous with the events they describe.[3]

Blaire French's essay addresses a topic that often falls outside the scope of academic discussion, namely, how Jews can engage their Judaism not through faith or ritual but rather through preserving and fostering traditions of memory. French's brief treatment of Chronicles is appropriate in this regard, for Chronicles is all but explicit that its authors have both preserved and cultivated alternate memories to those found in the Chronicler's sources. The Chronicler gives us a different David, a different temple, a different Levite priesthood, than what we encounter in other biblical texts which had fallen under the charge of the Jerusalem priests in the post-exilic period.[4] These texts were utilized to support the priestly cult in the temple; the Chronicler knows and cares about this cult, but his references to it are usually paralleled, if not overshadowed, by the identity of the personalities involved. (As French notes, David and the Levites stand out in this regard.) Ritual and "religion" are thus rendered meaningful only when read alongside people, groups, and their place in society. Thus French is correct to place attention on Chronicles while looking to the larger issue of Jewish identity beyond cultic or even "theological" contexts. Chronicles is of course a theological text, but its message moves beyond questions of ceremony and instead emphasizes

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 13-100; Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

[3] I have addressed this more recently with regard to the formation of the Book of Jeremiah, largely a product of the first half of the Babylonian exile and thus temporally proximate to the events and individuals depicted therein. See my essay "The Medium and the Message, or, What is Deuteronomistic about the Book of Jeremiah?", *ZAW* 126 (2014): 208-227.

[4] Carr, 213-214, 223-225.

the place of ceremony within the life of a community now presented with alternative accounts of their cultural history.

But if all biblical texts (or those that purport to be historical in orientation) are constructed memories, then we might push the matter a bit further by asking why the memory constructed by the Chronicler is different than the his sources and their own mnemonic constructs. The Chronicler's sources – the books of Samuel through Kings, the Torah, the books of the prophets – are literary reflections, reactions and refractions of events, but the work of the Chronicler is primarily a literary reaction/refraction of *texts*. Contemporary research into the formation of the book of Chronicles has pointed to its strongly learned, exegetical ethos, its routine inter-textual references to antecedent literary works, and even its strong association of scribalism-literacy with the prophecy and revelation.[5] It is true that most of the Chronicler's sources contain some dimension of the aforementioned features, but these features appear with greater frequency and in a more explicit manner in Chronicles. Chronicles is in essence a meditation on an authoritative corpus of texts and how the past is mediated through them.

Chronicles thus marries memory to text; at least in the Chronicler's (theoretical) view, one cannot lay claim to the former without affirming the centrality of the latter. A pertinent example is found toward the very end of 1-2 Chronicles, namely, the Chronicler's characterization of the Babylonian exile. No other event short of the Exodus itself weighs more heavily in biblical memory than the Babylonian exile, and it is beyond doubt that the Chronicler's audience was intimately familiar with this event. Yet while the Chronicler notes the end of the monarchy (2 Chr 36:17-20), the details of military conquest, destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, and the experience of forced migration are almost completely absent. Rather, the period of the exile is referred to as a matter of the land taking "its sabbaths" for "seventy years" (v. 21), recruiting the language of cosmic balance and restoration found in the Priestly traditions in

[5] Martti Nissinen, "Since When Do Prophets Write?", in *The Footsteps of Sherlock Holmes: Studies in the Biblical Text in Honour of Anneli Aejmelaeus* (Leuven: Peeters, 2014), 602-604, 606.

Leviticus and exegetically fusing it with the words of the prophet Jeremiah, who spoke of a span of 70 years of exile from the land (Jer 25:11; 29:10).[6] In essence, the Chronicler has recruited terms and images from text traditions that were known to his audience, and suggests that it is in the relationship *between* these traditions that the period of the exile should be remembered. Despite the book of Lamentations, the woeful oracles of Ezekiel, the various psalms of lament, and the narratives that attempted to account for the great devastation of the Babylonian conquest (Jeremiah 39-44; 2 Kings 24-25), the Chronicler frames the memory of this experience in terms of texts that sanctified cycles of time and proved the efficacy and truth of prophecy.

It is here where we should consider one of French's comments: "The Chronicler speaks to the people of Israel in the aftermath of the traumatic events of the Babylonian exile… Even though the Chronicler presents a new version of events, his account, no less than that of Genesis or Samuel or Kings, continues to bear out the same theme: God's involvement in the salvation of Israel." The need to affirm God's intervention in Israel's history is, as French implies, a major concern of the Chronicler. If the Chronicler does so with the Babylonian exile in mind, then the strategy of sacral cycles qualifies the exilic experience not as a disruption of YHWH's hegemony over history but as evidence of it and even an argument for it: the cosmic significance of the military and cultural crisis is elucidated through the Chronicler's rhetoric.

The metadynamics of such a maneuver not only affects the manner in which the exile is remembered, but how other text traditions – which offer alternative perceptions – might be prioritized among the Chronicler's audience. It is essential here to bear in mind that the Chronicler most likely wrote his work for a community of his peers, and that this peer group was very likely a scribal group or groups contributing to the constellation of literati defined by the institution of the Jerusalem temple. The Chronicler's treatment of his source texts and his past announces to others how he and

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[6] See the discussion by Louis C. Jonker, "The Chronicler and the Prophets: Who Were His Authoritative Sources?", *SJOT* 22 (2008): 281-283.

his community self-identify. Some scholars view this rhetorical move as prescriptive in nature, i.e., this version of the past is presented as the proper way to remember it (to argue, perhaps, for changes in the present and for the future).[7] But the fact that the Chronicler frames his literary memory in a way that draws from, but does not lay claim to, his sources suggests that he recognized other points on the mnemonic spectrum.

I would thus suggest an adjustment to French's view that the Chronicler wrote in the "aftermath" of the Babylonian exile, an event that ended in 538 BCE with the rise of Persia. Most researchers into the composition of Chronicles would place its origins in the mid-to-late Persian period, that is, roughly 150-200 years after the end of the exile.[8] The aftermath of the exile seems to characterize the liminal era of most of the 6th century BCE, inclusive of the early Persian period when waves of Jews returned to their ancestral homeland only to find other Jewish groups who had never left and who had developed very different worldviews (538-522 BCE). We may identify a shift away from this liminal era with the rise of Darius and the promotion of a Persian imperial mythology that extended over diverse Jewish groups and set their diversity within a concept of a divinely sponsored world order maintained by Persian rule. This ideology dominated from ca. 522 BCE to the end of the Persian era (332 BCE) and created a sense of cosmic order that ushered in a new social paradigm where Jewish institutions were subsets of a larger imperial reality; from the Jewish perspective, this unfolded according to YHWH's will.[9]

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[7] Yeong Seon Kim, *The Temple Administration and the Levites in Chronicles,* (Washington DC: Catholic Biblical Association, 2014).

[8] On the mid to late 4th century BCE date, see H.G.M. Williamson, *1-2 Chronicles* (Grand Rapids/London: Eerdmans, 1982), 15-16; Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 3-7.

[9] On the Persian cosmic ideology and its reflection in prophetic literature of the period, see Christine Mitchell, "Achamenid Persian Concepts Pertaining to Covenant and Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi," *Covenant in the Persian Period,* ed. Gary N. Knoppers and Richard Bautch, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2014) (in press).

There can be no doubt that the memory of the Babylonian exile persisted well into this period and beyond. Indeed, the Hellenistic-era book of Daniel makes this clear, as Daniel wonders why the "exile" has not ended even in his own day (Dan 9:1-2). But it is Persian imperial mythology and its implications for Jewish identity that most strongly informs the Chronicler's engagement of the past, including his engagement of the Babylonian exile. We must bear in mind that Chronicles seems to know and use major portions of Ezra-Nehemiah, which contains a very different view of the Babylonian exile, one that strongly favored a particular group of Persian-period Jews and disqualified all others. In Ezra-Nehemiah, it is "the descendants of the exiled" (*bene ha-golah*) who alone inherit Israelite identity, tradition, and land, while other Jewish groups are polemically labelled "foreigners."[10] And Ezra-Nehemiah's persistent appeal to Persian imperial administration, diplomatic machinery, and royal geography affix these qualifications to the Jewish iteration of Persian imperial mythology.[11] For the tradents behind Ezra-Nehemiah, the exile was YHWH's will, but its purpose was to single-out one and only one group to bear the torch of Judaism in the face of the rejected other(s).

The Chronicler's strategy for memory construction is a reaction against this ideology. It provides a different emphasis on what the exile meant: its purpose related not to the selection or rejection of a particular group or groups but to the land's rejuvenation, supported by both

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[10] Mark Leuchter, "The Exegesis of Jeremiah in and beyond Ezra 9-10," *VT* 65 (2015): 62-80.

[11] On the distinctively royal-imperial geographical worldview in Ezra-Nehemiah, see Thomas B. Dozeman, "Geography and History in Herodotus and in Ezra-Nehemiah," *JBL* 122 (2003): 457-466. On the use of administrative machinery and documents, see Richard C. Steiner, "Bishlam's Archival Search Report in Nehemiah's Archive: Multiple Introductions and Reverse Chronological Order as Clues to the Origin of the Aramaic Letters in Ezra 4-6," *JBL* 125 (2006): 641-676. The outstanding "official" document in Ezra-Nehemiah is the Artaxerxes Rescript in Ezra 7:12-26; though many scholars do not see this as an authentic royal composition, it still emulates royal-diplomatic rhetoric and hierarchies and characterizes the reinforcement of the Jewish world in Yehud as a matter of imperial interest and fiat.

prophecy (Jeremiah) and law (Leviticus). Moreover, all groups living in that land share in its sacral renewal (e.g., the lineages in 1 Chronicles 1—9), not simply those who endured the experience of forced migration to Mesopotamia.[12] Finally, the Chronicler offers a (somewhat unsubtle) comment on the transience of imperial cultures: in one breath, 2 Chronicles 36 subsumes Babylonian policies within the sacral-cosmic cycle that now qualified the exilic period and experience (v. 21) and, in another, places Persia within this same conceptual context (vv. 22-23). This last passage, 2 Chr 36:22-23, is especially important, as it is reliant upon and forms a doublet with Ezra 1:1-4.[13] The reproduction of this older material in Chronicles, however, is the final comment on the purpose it served in Ezra-Nehemiah: all empires claiming to be the culmination of history rise and fall, because YHWH's intentions for Israel transcend imperial structures and strictures. If the Chronicler was writing in the latter half of the 4th century BCE, this reading of the past would have shaped perceptions of the present as well, with rising insurrection from within the empire and threats from Greece beyond its borders making likely the end of Persian hegemony.

The Chronicler, then, appears indeed to be forging a method for retaining a sense of Jewish identity, but by accounting for diversity and difference in his day in the face of growing crises rather than in response to a recent crisis such as the exile. It is not just the memory of the past that is being invoked, but the recognition of *diverse* memories and how they have unfurled down to his own day. The Chronicler tips his hat to the version of memory and identity constructs of Ezra-Nehemiah, just as he tips his hat to his other sources. But he does so not to lay exclusive claim to the construction of a new memory, but instead to call his audience to consider, carefully, the diversity of options for understanding history and

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[12] On the inclusive ethos of the genealogies in the opening chapters of 1-2 Chronicles, see Yigal Levin, "Who Was the Chronicler's Audience? A Hint From his Genealogies," *JBL* 122 (2003): 229-245.

[13] On the priority of the Ezra parallel, see Mark Leuchter, "Rethinking the 'Jeremiah' Doublet in Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles," *What Was Authoritative for Chronicles?*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi and Diana Edelman (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011): 196-200.

their place within it. The Chronicler transforms his sources but does not attempt to sideline or replace them. Rather, his invocation of the past is facilitated through the ongoing viability of his sources; 1-2 Chronicles may constitute a form of historiography that flirts with the concept of wisdom, challenging the audience to consider, understand, and choose righteousness over folly by knowing and thinking about their alternatives.[14]

So, in returning to our opening anecdote – the "Cap'n Crunch effect" is in full force in the Chronicler's work, with common sources arranged in a manner that yields a *meaningful* memory of the past. In my view, this results from clear and deliberate design on the part of the Chronicler, but the end result is a canonical work that, for at least some Jews in antiquity, became an authoritative account of the past and a blueprint for community organization and identity. Chronicles supports the view that YHWH intervened in national events, but this intervention cannot be reduced to monolithic, dogmatic views that advocate for one partisan ideology or another (*pace* Ezra-Nehemiah). The Chronicler advocates for a complicated past attested broadly throughout the textual record before his intended audience (in 1-2 Chronicles but also in its sources that carried continued authority). The audience is beckoned to consider the different fragments of experience emanating from different corners of earlier Israelite society in developing its own sense of identity.[15] In the context of

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[14] On the Chronicler's hermeneutical stance *vis a vis* his sources, see Louis C. Jonker, "Reforming History: The Hermeneutical Significance of the Books of Chronicles," VT 57 (2007): 21-44. If the Chronicler was indeed a Levite, the creation of a work concerned with wisdom enculturation matches other Levitical redactional works of the late 4th century that appear to do the same, e.g., the Book of the Twelve (i.e., Hosea-Malachi) which opens and closes with wisdom tropes (Hos 14:10/Mal 3:16-18) and the Psalter. On the Levitical redaction of the Book of the Twelve, see James G. Nogalski, "One Book and Twelve Books: The Nature of the Redactional Work and the Implications of Cultic Source Material in the Book of the Twelve," *Two Sides of a Coin,* ed. Thomas Römer, (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2010): 40-46. On the Psalter, see Mark S. Smith, "The Levitical Compilation of the Psalter," *ZAW* 103 (1991): 258-263.

[15] The Chronicler here appears to anticipate the ideology of the early rabbinic movement, where once-exclusive sectarian traditions were merged into a complex intellectual discourse.

a contemporary Judaism that is increasingly given to polarization – secular vs. religious, conservative vs. liberal, hawkish vs. dovish – a careful consideration of what Chronicles really says about Jewish life and intellectual culture is entirely warranted, irrespective of whether it is viewed as a work of inspired scripture or insightful social commentary.

See Shaye J.D. Cohen, "The Significance of Yavneh: Pharisees, Rabbis, and the end of Jewish Sectarianism," *HUCA* 55 (1984): 27-53.