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Levites of Memory in Chronicles and Some Considerations about Historical Levites in Late-Persian Yehud

1 Introduction

I was invited to examine the roles that remembering Levites in the context of the world/s of the past conjured by Chronicles had among the literati of Yehud. Certainly, the Levites played an important role in the past world/s conjured by Chronicles. But to what effect? What impact did the references to Levites in Chronicles have in the memory-scape of the literati who read this book as part of a larger core, authoritative repertoire of texts, and why did the Levites of the past, as such and with their diversity, become an important, but complex site of memory?¹

That said, it is unfeasible to properly address these questions without first dealing with the historical society in which these literati lived. For this reason and given the general context of the workshop and the issues it explores, in what follows I intend to raise a strong note of caution about historical reconstructions that assume (a) an ongoing social struggle about the roles and status of actual Levites *vis à vis* priests in the late Persian period and its close aftermath, (b) the existence of a substantial group of Levites who as such served as agents for the production of texts and memories advancing their case, and (c) the usage of acts of writing, rewriting, editing, and I would add, reading the relevant texts about the past as key tools used by all in their putative, actual struggle to impose their particular vision on the matter of the roles and status of the Levites in the present of the late Persian Yehudite community and its close aftermath.²

1 The approach taken here on matters of social memory is elaborated in e.g., Ehud Ben Zvi, *Social Memory among the Literati of Yehud*, BZAW 509 (Berlin: de Gruyter 2019).

2 These positions have encountered increased acceptance in the field and were advanced or implicitly assumed by many of my good friends and thoughtful colleagues at the workshop. I assume that these positions will be well represented in this volume. For earlier works that represent or build on this approach, see, e.g., Louis C. Jonker, “Holiness and the Levites: Some Reflections on the Relationship between Chronicles and Pentateuchal Traditions,” in *Eigensinn und Entstehung der Hebräischen Bibel. Erhard Blum zum siebzigsten Geburtstag*, ed. Joachim J. Krause, Wolfgang Oswald and Kristin Weingart, FAT 136 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 457–74; Louis C.

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Thus, this paper both explores the social roles of imagining and remembering Levites of old among these literati by reading and rereading their Book of Chronicles and also questions widely-agreed assumptions to provide additional lenses to approach the general issue of the Levites in late-Persian (or early Hellenistic) Yehud. This questioning may, in turn, provide an impetus for future reconsiderations of the social roles of remembering past and future Levites in late-Persian Yehud through readings and rereadings of texts other than Chronicles within the authoritative repertoire of these literati.³

2 Levites of Memory: Matters of Background, Texts, Memories and Mental Libraries

It is certainly understandable that if one focuses only on texts such as Chronicles or Ezekiel 40–48 (e. g., Ezek 40:44–46; 44:10–15; 48:8–14) or several sections of Numbers,⁴ one would think that Levites were a very hot issue in late-Persian Yehud, and likely that Levites were a strong separate group with agency in the matter of shaping social memory.⁵ But these texts never existed alone. They were part of a repertoire of core texts shaping the community that imagined itself shaped around texts, each

Jonker, “Numbers and Chronicles: False Friends or Close Relatives?,” *HeBAI* 8 (2019), 332–77 and the substantial bibliography cited in these works. See also, though from a perspective narrowly focused on the Korahites, Itamar Kislev, “What Happened to the Sons of Korah? The Ongoing Debate Regarding the Status of the Korahites,” *JBL* 138 (2019): 497–511. For another, historical approach that construes the Levites as a central group throughout ancient Israel, including the Persian period, see Mark Leuchter, *The Levites and the Boundaries of Israelite Identity* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2017).

3 It goes without saying that these reconsiderations of the social roles of remembering past and future Levites in late-Persian Yehud through readings and rereadings of e. g., Ezek 40:44–46; 44:10–15; 48:8–14 or the relevant sections of Numbers within the context of Numbers or the Pentateuch cannot be carried out within the limits of this paper. It is hoped, however, that the present paper will provide both an impetus for and research questions for subsequent studies on these matters.

4 As it is well known, and unlike the case in Genesis-Leviticus, Levites play important roles in Numbers. On Numbers and its Levites, see, e. g., Christian Frevel, “Ending with the High Priest: The Hierarchy of Priests and Levites in the Book of Numbers,” in *Torah and the Book of Numbers*, ed. Christian Frevel, Thomas Pola and Aaron Schart, *FATII* 62 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 138–63 and bibliography.

5 These texts, of course, are the very reason that the positions about which I want to raise a note of caution are so popular and seemingly so well-supported.

mutually informing the other.⁶ This repertoire constituted a mental library that, as a whole, informed and was constantly informed by their readings of each of these texts. In other words, books or texts for that matter did not exist in a vacuum but carried meaning within and in relation to an eco-system, the mentioned library.⁷

To be sure, this library, as a whole, embodied, reflected, shaped and communicated a comprehensive memory-scape, as most if not all the relevant books conjured images of the past and at times also of the future. Since their imagined, socially-shared, comprehensive image of the past, i.e., their social memory, was not and could never have been informed only by their readings of Chronicles or some sections of other books (e.g. Ezek 40–48) then, for the present purposes, a key question is how they imagined and remembered their Levites, on the grounds of the mentioned mental library.

When one looks at the entire repertoire of the Late Persian/early Hellenistic period in this way, the crucial observation is quite simple: they were rarely mentioned.⁸ Moreover, when there are references to them, they tended to concentrate in some books or even sections thereof, thus leaving minimal references to them elsewhere.

If one focuses, for instance, on the Levites that populated the monarchic world as it existed within the memory of these literati, one cannot but notice that, with the exception of Chronicles, the Levites play only marginal roles in the worlds of memory about the monarchic period shaped by the other “historical” books.⁹

⁶ It is widely agreed that the Yehudite literati construed Israel (and themselves) as a group centered around *tôrâ* and that this *tôrâ* was largely considered to be instantiated in the Pentateuch as they understood it, that is, in a way strongly informed by the rest of their core textual repertoire including, inter alia, the prophetic books, the deuteronomistic historical collection, Chronicles, Proverbs, and thus as a Jerusalem-centered *tôrâ*. On this concept and its eventual spread outside Yehud see Sylvie Honigman and Ehud Ben Zvi, “The Spread of the Ideological Concept of a (Jerusalem-Centered) *tôrâ*-centred Israel beyond Yehud: Observations and Implications,” *HeBAI* 9/4 (2020): 370–97. ⁷ I explored these issues at some length in my *Social Memory among the Literati of Yehud*, BZAW 509 (Berlin: De Gruyter 2019), and needless to say, the conceptualization of these issues in terms of ‘library’ owes much to the work of Umberto Eco.

⁸ The following observations are in line with, and further develop those advanced in Yigal Levin, “Were there Levites in the Second Temple?,” paper read at the EABS Annual Conference, University of Warsaw, 11–14 August 2019; cf. Yigal Levin, “The Role of the Levites in Chronicles: Past, Present, Utopia?,” in *Ben Porat Yosef: Studies in the Bible and Its World. Essays in Honor of Joseph Fleishman*, ed. Michael Avioz, Omer Minka and Yael Shemesh, AOAT 458 (Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2019), 133–46 and note especially the earlier work of Cana Werman; see C. Werman, “Levi and Levites in the Second Temple Period,” *DSD* 4 (1997): 211–25.

⁹ Levites appear as prominent characters in-the-land, but still pre-monarchic world, evoked by Judges 17–21. This section of Judges was meant to evoke and communicate a need for a king. As Amanda Davis (Bledsoe) put it, the Levites were imagined as cultic specialists and deviants and

In fact, Levites are almost nowhere to be seen in the large imaginary world of memory of the monarchic period conjured by Samuel or Kings. Levites played no memorable role in the larger historical scheme in these books, except for carrying the Ark, and even that not consistently and not necessarily alone.¹⁰ Significantly, when readers vicariously experienced the great event of David bringing the Ark to Jerusalem through their reading of 2 Samuel 6:12–19, their attention was not drawn to Levites as a distinct group that carried a particular role, or to Levites at all, for that matter. One may even argue that as they read the text and imagined themselves partaking in the events they saw no Levites, as none is mentioned in this text, and can only compare and contrast 2 Samuel 6:12–19 and the world it conjures with that of 1 Chronicles 15:25–16:4 and its world.¹¹

as the “ultimate example of moral decay” in this section, but just as importantly, also as powerless figures in their own putative society. Thus, unlike the doomed dynasty of Elide priests whose memory confirms the necessity (alongside the problematic character) of kingship in Samuel, the Levites of Judges may only contribute to the construction of a general sense of societal chaos. In any event these Levites are nothing like those of Chronicles (or Numbers, for that matter). See Amanda M. Davis, “Structure, Repetition, and the Characterization of Levites in Judges 17–21,” *Glossolalia* 3/2 (2011), 1–16.

10 Levites are explicitly mentioned in 1 Sam 6:15; 2 Sam 15:24 and 1 Kgs 8:4 and all three associate them with carrying the Ark. 1 Kgs 12:31 does not refer to Levites as a group distinct from the priests, but advances the point that all proper priests are from the tribe of Levi. In 2 Sam 15:24–26 the Levites are under the charge of Zadok, the priest. In 1 Kgs 8:4 the text indicates that the priests and the Levites carried the Ark, and thus it balances the impression caused by v. 3 that seems to indicate that only the priests carried it. Josephus in *Ant* 6.15 appears to reflect a tradition in which the Levites are not mentioned in 1 Sam 6:15. The text of 1 Sam 6:19 appears in two different versions (MT and LXX; the latter reading “and the sons of Iechonias were not pleased”) and may raise questions relevant to the matters discussed here. One may mention that neither Eleazar the son of Abinadab of Kiriath-jearim who was in charge of the Ark (1 Sam 7:1) nor Uzza and Ahio are anywhere referred to as a Levites (or ‘proper’ priests for that matter) in Samuel. Moreover, it is likely that none of them was understood by the Chronicler as Levites (or priests). See Gary N. Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 10–29*, AB 12A (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 587, and see 1 Chr 15:13 in the context of the world of Chronicles. It is also worth noting in this context that Obed-Edom the Gittite who takes care of the Ark is not a Levite in 2 Sam 6:10–12, but Chronicles that explicitly refers to him as a Gittite (1 Chr 13:9–14) may have, by implication, conjured an image of him as a Levite (cf. the cumulative weight of 1 Chr 16:5, 38; 26:4, 8, 15). No similar, explicit and cumulative evidence exists regarding Uzza, Ahio, or Eleazar son of Abinadab in Chronicles.

11 On these texts and esp. Chronicles’ reconfiguration of the narrative, both at large and in many details, see Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 10–29*, 578–661. It is worth stressing that in Chronicles, the clothing of David *partially* overlaps that of the Levites (and the singers); see 1 Chr 15:27. The *partial* Levitization of David and its corresponding *partial* ‘Davidization’ of the Levites in Chronicles requires a separate discussion that cannot be carried out here. That said, it is worth stressing that neither process could have led to an image of Levites as “priests” or “priest-like.” The opposite holds true, for these processes would have stressed the differences between these relevant groups.

As important as historiographical narratives were for shaping constructions of the monarchic past, other texts also contributed much to “sculpting” memories of the monarchic past of long ago in the minds and imagination of the Yehudite literati. Among all these texts, none were more important than the prophetic books. Most significantly, the Levites were mostly unseen in the worlds of memory shaped by *most* of the prophetic books. In fact, Levites rarely populated these books at all and when they did, they tended to appear in the context of shaping memories about the utopian future, not the past.

To be sure, Levites were important in Ezekiel 40–48, but significantly only in this section of Ezekiel. Ezekiel here (and I along with others would argue in many other respects) was indeed substantially different from all the other prophetic books. Moreover, the absence of Levites from the late monarchic period conjured by Ezekiel 1–39 is at least as remarkable as the condemnatory reference to them in e. g., Ezekiel 44:9–15. Further, a section of Ezekiel (Ezek 40–48) is certainly not weightier than the cumulative weight of the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah in terms of its contribution to the construction of the late monarchic past as a whole or memories about it.¹²

Where are the Levites in the world of imagination communicated by Isaiah? They occurred only once and in the usual second slot to the pair ‘priests and levites’, that in itself appeared in the context of conjuring memories of a utopian future (see Isa 66:21).

What about the book of Jeremiah, the other central prophetic book for shaping and reflecting memories of the late monarchic and early postmonarchic periods and partially covering a period similar to that of Ezekiel? It refers to Levites only in Jeremiah 33:14–22 (18–22), again in the context of conjuring a memory of the utopian future, associated with David. Moreover, the text refers to the Levitical priests, using a language clearly reminiscent of Deuteronomy (cf. Deut 17:9, 18; 18:1; 24:8; 27:9; Josh 3:3) that likely refers to priests who are from the tribe of Levi, rather than Levites as a group separate from the priests (see esp. Jer 33:18).

¹² The Prophetic Books Collection (i. e., Isaiah-Malachi; hereafter PBC) focuses on the late monarchic period. The collection does not contain a prophetic book putatively associated with, e. g., the days of David, or Solomon or, for that matter, Jehoshaphat, despite the presence of prominent prophetic characters in all these periods as remembered by the very same literati reading the PBC. The generative grammars responsible for this distribution cannot be discussed here. See E. Ben Zvi, “Remembering the Prophets through the Reading and Rereading of a Collection of Prophetic Books in Yehud: Methodological Considerations and Explorations,” in *Remembering and Forgetting in Early Second Temple Judah*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi and Christoph Levin, FAT 85 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 17–44.

Within the Twelve Prophetic Books Collection (Hosea-Malachi), none of those directly shaping and conjuring memories about the monarchic period (e.g., Hosea, Amos, Micha, Zephaniah) draw any attention to the presence of Levites as a separate group. In fact, they never refer to Levites at all.

To be sure, Levites are mentioned in two books among those that do not claim to directly portray (and thus ask the readers to imagine themselves as direct observers of) the monarchic past, namely Zechariah and Malachi. The text in Zechariah 12:12–14 conjured among the literati a memory of a future, great mourning that would serve as a prelude to a utopian future (Zech 13:1). The text draws their attention to three main groups of mourners represented in the text by the formula “the family of the house of X,” with X standing for, in order of appearance, David, Nathan and Levi (vv. 12–13). The first stands for the clan associated with political leadership (but significantly, the text does not necessarily refer to a king; cf. Zech 14:9, 16, 19, in which YHWH is king), the second, for the clan of prophetic leadership, and the third (v. 13) for the clan of priestly leadership.¹³ In other words, again, the text conjured memories of the future, providing hope – even the act of mourning was portrayed as expression of YHWH’s favor (see Zech 12:10) – and as it did so, it included a reference to Levites who (most likely) did not stand for a group separate from the priests.

The literati encountered references to Levites (i.e., descendants of Levi) in another book within the Twelve Prophetic Books Collection. Levites are mentioned

13 There is a reference to a fourth group, the family of the Shimeites, although it is not referred to as the family of the house of Shimei. It is very unclear what it might have stood for. One possibility is that the reference was to be construed as enigmatic by the readership and as such contributed to the general atmosphere of the future world of mourning portrayed in the text. To be sure, some have suggested that it refers to a second Levitical family, but only on the grounds that *some* of the other individual called Shimei in the HB were Levites (see, e.g., Paul Redditt, *Zechariah 9–14*, IECOT [Stuttgart: Kohlhammer; 2012], 112 and bibliography). But one must take into account that all of the Levites called Shimei were only secondary and indeed extremely minor characters. In fact, of all the Shimei mentioned in the HB, the two most memorable were the Saulide Shimei and Shimei son of Gera, both opponents of David. Gonzalez attempts to solve this difficulty by claiming that “the mention of the unimportant Levitical clan of Shimei beside the clans of the houses of David, Nathan, and Levi is probably an indication that it is precisely this Levitical group that developed Zech 9–14” (see Hervé Gonzalez, “Zechariah 9–14 and the Continuation of Zechariah during the Ptolemaic Period,” *JHS* 13 [2013], article 9, p. 31 n. 113, <https://doi.org/10.5508/jhs.2013.v13.a9>). But this is just an *ad hoc* solution to a problem that arises only because one claims beforehand that the House of Shimei was a reference to a second Levitical clan, which then must be separated from Levi. The list concludes in v. 14 with a reference to כל המשפחות הנשארות, i.e., the remaining clans. The text also explicitly refers to the women of each of these groups and to their separate mourning. Any substantial discussion of this text is well beyond the scope of this paper.

in Malachi 2:1–9 (vv. 4, 8) and 3:1–4 (v. 3). The first concerns the covenant of Levi and appears in the context of a condemnation of postmonarchic priests. The latter occurs in the context of shaping memories of a utopian future. Although using ‘Levi’ as a signifier of choice is relevant, the key question for our present endeavor is what was signified by ‘Levi.’ In both cases, ‘Levi’ stands for the priests, not the Levites as a group separate from the priests.

In sum, imagining and remembering a monarchic period in which Levites were a powerful group related but separate from priests, stood as an exception to a widely attested tendency whose presence is not only overwhelming but also independent of usual considerations of literary genre.

Since references to Levites in general, and particularly to them as a group separate from the priests, are so rare in the relevant repertoire and memory of the literati, and since they were concentrated in a few particular texts or sections thereof, references to them should *not* be taken as a default, expected feature, but as a rare, ‘odd’ feature of certain texts. Of course, what is ‘odd’ always calls for explanation. Moreover, each one of the texts in which the Levites appear prominently in the manner mentioned above requires a distinct explanation since, *inter alia*, meaning depends on the literary context in which the text appears.¹⁴

This contribution focuses on a prominent case, Chronicles – an entire book in which Levites appear often and frequently as a group separate from the priests. Why would literati whose world of memory of the monarchic period was certainly not suffused with Levites, never mind powerful Levites who are not priests, advance images and evoke memories of a world in which all the above are regularly present?

¹⁴ As per its title the present contribution focuses on Chronicles. That said, the implications of the observation above may have relevance for the study of Levites of memory in other books or sections thereof. Of course, each one of these texts should be studied on their own, with an eye to the world of memory evoked by them and its own specific preferences. As suggested in n. 3, it is hoped that this contributing may end up encouraging the development of such future studies.

3 Constructing Historical Reconstructions of Late-Persian Yehud Levites and Barriers to the Acceptance of the Mentioned Common Positions

Within the world of studies on Chronicles, a somewhat ‘traditional’ approach to address the questions that conclude the previous section would be to assume that the book constructed a world in which Levites were very present in the monarchic period, because it projected into the past either the current historical circumstances of the society in which it emerged or what a significant group considered to be a different and better society. In other words, from this perspective, it projected a society in which the Levites are a central group. In the first case, the book would be directly mimetic of the present and in the second, it would be a testimony to a desire for change that was accepted and integrated into the larger authoritative repertoire of the literati and their mental ‘library.’ Both these options require, in one way or another, that the Levites be a powerful group in Late-Persian Yehud. If the Levites were indeed the powerful, historical group described by many scholars (see Introduction) then it would be relatively easy to write the rest of this essay. But in what follows I will argue that it is difficult to make the case that the Levites were indeed such a historically powerful group and thus that a substantially different approach is required. But first things first, why is it so hard to make that case?

For one it is difficult to make the case that the Levites were such a powerful group among these Yehudite literati (or society at large), when the authoritative texts of the literati of the time drew so little attention to them in images of the monarchic past, or the utopian future, and for the most part are completely silent about them in the present *from an overall perspective*.¹⁵

¹⁵ To be sure, theoretically one might argue that there existed at the time multiple, separate groups of literati in Yehud and that each had its own authoritative repertoire and that these repertoires, in turn, contributed to the creation and maintenance of social and ideological boundaries among them. Besides the methodological concerns raised by any approach that keeps constructing separate historical communities for a ‘different’ book (or section thereof, or even proposed redactional level), there exists the very basic problem of the small number of literati in Yehud, their likely shared socialization/education as literati, and the very integrative, multivocal character of the various works in their authoritative repertoire. This integrative, multivocal character is not incidentally most prominent in Chronicles, and most relevant to the present purposes since it is abundantly attested on matters of Levites and priests. Chronicles cannot be pinned down as pro-priestly or pro-levitical but as a multivocal, multi-perspectival, and integrative book on

Second, there is an understandable tendency among scholars today to associate the development of texts shaping social memory with relatively powerful groups struggling with each other, writing and reading these texts as important tools in their struggles, either as an attempt to socialize the other into the ‘proper’ way or, and more often, as tools to ‘preach to the choir’ which is a way to socialize the in-group into particular ways of thinking, countering the possibility of deviance, and as important tools in cultural hegemony battles.

The reasons for this tendency are not difficult to grasp: we are all children of our times and we are all aware of multiple such cases in the last two centuries, especially in Europe. In all these cases, memory-shaping agents on opposing sides worked hard to construe each other as a dangerous enemy Other. Most significantly, these memory agents had powerful social, cultural and political structures supporting them, such as the nationalizing states of this period, or massive political movements battling for control of, or at least increased social, political and cultural power within a particular state, or liberation movements.

But the literati reading, producing, and re-producing these texts were a really small group in the late Persian Yehud, in and around Jerusalem. This group of highly sophisticated writers (and readers) were most likely socialized together and in a similar way, despite all the personal differences one might imagine. Moreover, this group did not have any important political power, nor could they have been supported by any internal group with significant political power. Small groups with no political power and no expectation to achieve it under normal circumstances, may and usually do find ways to resist imperial attempts at hegemonic power, but they tend to use their socially shared memory to emphasize social cohesion, to facilitate the group’s social reproduction. They tend to avoid actual, long-standing divisive struggles that relate to their present, unlike large, powerful groups engaged in struggles with others.

Further and directly related to the Yehudite literati and their sub-altern society, why should we assume that among people for whom authoritative texts *per se* did not play a normative role in the establishment and policing of prescribed or actual behaviour, would anyone consider as their most effective way to accomplish, practical, internal change to write, re-write, read and re-read texts, and in our case, just a few of them, most of which are not even self-standing.

Third, there is the cumulative evidence from later periods in Judah. The authoritative texts of the literati of late-Persian Yehud are not the only ones to draw very little attention to Levites and be silent about them in the present of

these matters. See below for the social-anthropological background underlying these features. On Chronicles as neither pro-priestly nor pro-levitical see notes 34 and 35 below.

the community *from an overall perspective*. Later textual corpora from the Late Second Temple as different as Sirach, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Philo, Josephus and the Dead Sea Scrolls also fail to provide evidence for the Levites as the kind of powerful, independent group in tension with the priests that scholars have proposed existed in late-Persian Yehud. Leaving aside Ezra-Nehemiah,¹⁶ the Levites *as a separate group* in the Jerusalemite cult play no role in Sirach,¹⁷ nor do they later in 1–2 Maccabees. Moreover, actual Levites populating the historical present of the Late Second Temple are difficult to find in Philo, Josephus and the Dead Sea Scrolls (hereafter DSS), despite the fact that the Levites are mentioned in these corpora in various ways in reference to constructions of pre-monarchic and monarchic pasts and, in some texts from DSS, also in reference to future situations.

In fact, more than two decades ago, Cana Werman proposed that the Aramaic Levi Document (hereafter ALD), and several other texts of the Late Second Temple period attempted in their own ways to address and respond to the problem that the scarcity of Levites in their own times created for their own imaginaries.¹⁸

In other words, scholars who maintain that there was a very substantial, and powerful group of Levites engaged in an ongoing struggle with the priests of late-Persian period Yehud (or early Hellenistic) have to deal not only with the lack of clear evidence for their existence in this period, but also need to propose an explanation for the dramatic discontinuity between this period, as they construe it, and the later Second Temple era, from Sirach on.

16 There exist considerable questions about whether Ezra-Nehemiah provides a historically reliable image for Yehud in the Persian period, and if so, in relation to which selected issues and portrayals that may be the case. For one, the lack of any reference to the prominent presence, and from an administrative and political perspective key role of Ramat Raḥel in Yehud raises poignant questions about writing history in the form of a paraphrase of the book. Whether the image projected by this book is a reliable historical guide for the actual roles and positions and even the relative number of Levites in the Persian period is highly debatable. The cumulative weight of the other sources – see below – raises significant doubts on the matter. To be sure, none of this means that the voice embodied in Ezra-Nehemiah is not important in terms of memories about the Persian period in Hellenistic times (i. e., the likely time in which Ezra-Nehemiah emerged). Moreover, Ezra-Nehemiah clearly represents another ‘odd’ book, on account of its construction of the Levites, and as widely known, on account of a large number of other matters. Again, ‘odd’ books require explanations. Needless to say, any exploration of possible answers requires a separate discussion that cannot be carried out in this paper. For my own approach to some of the oddities of this book, though not those associated its portrayal of the Levites, see E. Ben Zvi and S. Honigman, “Remembering Three Nehemiahs in Late Second Temple Times: Patterns and Trajectories in Memory Shaping,” *JHS* 18 (2018), article 10, <https://doi.org/10.5508/jhs.2018.v18.a10>.
17 Sir. 45:6 refers to Aaron, and Moses his brother as a “son of Levi.” Levi, Levites and the like are not mentioned anywhere else in the book.

18 See Werman, “Levi and Levites.”

In contrast, not only is the position advanced here of a basic continuity between these two periods on this matter easier to maintain, but also, as I will argue below, in both cases uneasiness about the scarcity of Levites in the present led to a discursive, ideological and memory need to address through socially shared memories about the past and the future, so as to attenuate some tensions within the imaginary of the group.

For the purposes of the later argument, it is worth dwelling – even if briefly – on the Levites populating the works of Philo and Josephus. The former, seldom writes about them in his large oeuvre, but when he does, he often mentions Levites in the context of his reconfigurations and recontextualizations of some Pentateuchal themes.¹⁹ These themes are, for the most part, the violent actions taken by Levites in the golden calf episode which, not incidentally Philo relates to that of Phineas (e. g., *Spec.* 3.126–27; cf. *Spec.* 1.79),²⁰ the Korah rebellion and the confirmation of the primacy of the priestly line in its aftermath (e. g., *Moses* 2.174–79, 276–87), and the Levitical cities and at times, along with it the general characterization of Levites as substitutes for the first-born and landless (e. g. *Sacr.* 118, 127–30; *Spec.* 1.157–58, and which Philo also links to the golden calf episode). There is, however, one brief note in Philo's oeuvre that bears a different tone, namely the 'operational' portrayal of the tasks of the Levites in *Spec.* 1.156. To be sure, the question of whether Philo's portrayal of the Levites in *Spec.* 1.156 may be accepted as reliable evidence for the roles of the Levites at the Jerusalem temple during Philo's days remains an open question, but whatever that case may be, the depiction of the Levites's roles there is worth noticing. The relevant text reads:

After bestowing these great sources of revenue on the priests, he did not ignore those of the second rank either, namely the temple attendants. Some of these are stationed at the doors as gatekeepers at the very entrances, some within in front of the sanctuary to prevent any unlawful person from setting foot thereon, either intentionally or unintentionally. Some patrol around it turn by turn in relays by appointment night and day, keeping watch and guard at both seasons. Others sweep the porticoes and the open court, convey away the refuse and ensure cleanliness (*Spec.* 1.156; translation by F. H. Colson; *Philo VII*; LCL 320).

This text does indeed refer to a common feature in many characterizations of the Levites as gatekeepers, but it is particularly interesting that it does not refer

¹⁹ For a summary listing of the references to Levi and Levites in Philo and a brief discussion of the way in which they are both informed by the relevant Pentateuchal texts and advance a meaning of their own, see the famous index by J. W. Earp in F. H. Colson, *Philo vol. X*, LCL 379 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962 – reprint. 1991), 365–70.

²⁰ Cf. David Lincicum, "Philo on Phinehas and the Levites: Observing an Exegetical Connection," *BBR* 21 (2011): 43–50.

to Levites as singers, which is the other common feature attributed to them (see below).

As for Josephus' *Antiquities*, despite the many references to Levites in and of earlier times,²¹ when it comes to the Levites close to his own time,²² he has almost nothing to say, except that they were singers of hymns (see *Ant.* 20.216–18) and that on an occasion reported here, they persuaded the king (Agrippa II) to allow them to wear linen garments, like the priests, and to learn certain hymns. Josephus opposed these 'novelties.' This event, if it happened as it is depicted, is most likely to be understood as part and parcel of the tense relations between Agrippa II, who served as a kind of (Roman-appointed) temple supervisor with the power to appoint and remove high priests, and the Jerusalemite priests and local leadership.

A final observation concerning these matters, within the incredible variegated corpora of literature from the late Second Temple, the relation between the priests and Levites is consistently framed as complementary, with the priests in the higher hierarchical position, whether projected into the past, the future or into a normative textual performance of the present that should exist, (see, e.g., 1QS 2.19–23;²³ 1QWar 7:9–18, the imaginary of the Temple Scroll; CD 14:3–6; Philo's cited text, the normative value attached to memories of the confirmation of the role of the priests after Korah's rebellion). Levites may be present or absent in hierarchical constructions of society, but priests are always present (cf. 1QS 2.19–23 and 1QS6.3–9). Finally, Levi, the ancestor, is, at times, lionized, but mainly as the ancestor of the priestly line, not as a group separate and engaged in severe struggle against the priests.²⁴

21 Josephus' Levites of old fulfill multiple roles and are certainly significant. On these Levites of old, see esp. Christopher T. Begg, "The Levites in Josephus," *HUCA* 75 (2004): 1–22.

22 One should also note Josephus' account of the establishment of Onias IV's temple at Leontopolis, which is earlier than his period, but still in the late Second Temple period. As one would anticipate, in a report shaping memories about the establishment of a Temple, both priests and levites are mentioned (see *Ant* 13.63–73; and cf. other images of temple establishment in e.g., the Temple Scroll, in which both priests and levites play complementary roles).

23 Which reads "The priests shall enter in order foremost, one behind the other, according to their spirits. And the levites shall enter after them. In third place all the people shall enter in order, one after another, in thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens, so that each Israelite may know his standing in God's Community in conformity with an eternal plan. And no-one shall move down from his rank nor move up from the place of his lot."

24 E.g., Philo writes "while Reuben is the firstborn of Jacob, Levi is the first-born of Israel ... the fountain of that devout contemplation of the only wise being, on which Israel's rank is based, is the habit of service to God, and this service is symbolized by Levi" (*Sacr.* 119–120). Needless to say, Aaron is explicitly referred to as Aaron the Levite (*Worse*, 135). Comparable processes

In sum, the evidence from the late Second Temple does not allow us to construe the Levites as a powerful, substantial group like that proposed by many scholars for late-Persian Yehud, nor does it provide any comparative evidence for the kind of struggle in which these Levites engaged according to these proposals. The latter is particularly noteworthy, because the social and historical circumstances of the late Second Temple, unlike those in late-Persian (and early Hellenistic) Yehud supplied a fertile ground for social and ideological struggles, sectarian battles and the like.

To be sure, none of the above means that there were no Levites at all in these periods. To begin with, levites as singers in the Late Second Temple period appear, even if only once in Josephus (*Ant.* 20.216–18). Psalms seems to support their role as singers and performers (see multiple references to the Qorahites and the Asaphites),²⁵ and Levites were remembered as singers of an earlier period multiple times in the Mishna.²⁶ All this suggests that the association between temple singers and Levites in Chronicles was likely to reflect social reality (1 Chr 9:33; 15:19; 16:4–5; 2 Chr 20:19). Perhaps, the same may hold true for the gatekeepers (cf. 1 Chr 9:17–28; and see Philo *Spec.* 1.156). It is conceivable that actual singers, and likely gatekeepers and perhaps some comparable figures (see 1 Chr 9:25–29) already in Yehud ended up being identified as Levites and given genealogies that construed them as close as possible to the lineage of the person who embodied the temple and its service, Aaron, without being included in it (notice the clear disjunction at the beginning of 1 Chr 9:30).

To be sure, singers were directly responsible for the public performance of (authoritative) texts, had to ‘know’ them,²⁷ and contributed to the ‘proper’ performance of the cult. Gatekeepers might have constituted the only ‘force’ that was ‘in the hands’ of the priests and the temple as an institution. That said, these singers and gatekeepers were neither as influential and certainly not as *memorable* as the priests on the whole, but also and more importantly not as the Levites who

of memory-shaping and characterization of the great priestly ancestors are evident in texts as different from Philo, such as *ALD* (Aramaic Levi Document), *The Visions of Amram*, and the *Testament of Qahat*.

²⁵ See Pss 42; 44–49; 84–85; 87–88 (cf. 2 Chr 20:19) for the former; and Pss 73–83 (cf. 1 Chr 15:17–19; 16; 25:1–6; 2 Chr 19:30; 35:15) for the latter. The Qorahites are also explicitly singled out as gatekeepers in 1 Chr 9:19; 26:1. See below.

²⁶ See, e. g., m. Tamid 7.4; Pesah 5.7; Bik. 3.4; Sukkah 5.4; Mid. 2.5.

²⁷ There is no reason to assume that all the literati had to be priests, or Levites, or for that matter, that they had to be one of these two, even if the literati were directly or indirectly supported by the temple. This being so, it is possible, even likely that some of the singers might well have been among the literati, but levites as such were not literati any more than priests as such were.

were closely associated with the priests in the worlds of memory about monarchic times shaped by Chronicles.²⁸ In fact, one might argue that Chronicles is somewhat comparable to Josephus, since it expands significantly on a group that was so memorable in the past, but relatively marginal and certainly marginal as a group in relation to the priests in their respective present situations. That said, two major and very substantial differences must be kept in mind. First, Chronicles still talks proportionally much more about Levites of the monarchic period than Josephus, and second, Josephus and his world of knowledge and that of his readers was influenced by the very existence of Chronicles and its construction of monarchic Israel. Chronicles, of course, did not have Chronicles to rely upon, but texts about monarchic Israel such as Samuel-Kings and the prophetic books and none of them constructed the monarchic period in that manner. This being so, why did Chronicles construe the Levites as it did?

4 Exploring a Different Approach

The previous section raises the necessity of a new approach for addressing the last and related questions. In what follows I would like to explore one such approach, one whose starting points or assumptions include:

- (a) a guiding concept of a shared, ongoing mental library, alongside a shared, ongoing world of knowledge/encyclopedic knowledge, and of a shared ongoing memory-scape and social mindscape among the literati in which Chronicles emerged;²⁹

28 Contrast this with Ezra-Nehemiah which, as required by its basic story, conveys images of a restoration. Of course, as all restoration stories, it evokes and reshapes the past. Thus, Ezra-Nehemiah carries a voice that is evocative of that of the Chronicler, while at the same time overturning some important positions communicated by Chronicles. To some extent, one may argue that Ezra-Nehemiah appropriates (or at least attempts to appropriate) and reconfigures (or at least attempts to reconfigure) Chronicles. These matters require a separate discussion.

29 The underlying assumption implied here is that the Pentateuchal collection, the Deuteronomistic Historical Collection, the Prophetic Books Collection, most of the Psalms and Proverbs and a few other books that were eventually included in the Hebrew Bible (e. g., Lamentations, Ruth, but not e. g., Esther, Daniel) serve collectively as an *approximately representative* of the general authoritative repertoire of the literati in the late Persian-early Hellenistic Yehud and as such, that they may be used, from a *bird's-eye view* perspective, to construct a representative approximation to the mental, authoritative library of those few literati who read and reread, copied and edited, who likely read to others (cf. 2 Chr 17:7–9) these texts, and who ideologically construed their “Israel” and themselves as a text/*tôrâ*-centered community.

- (b) a historical reconstruction in which the literati tended to focus not on their manifested present world when reading, producing and re-producing their authority but mainly on worlds of imagination about their past and future. And that this was done as a way to not only support hope, and social cohesion and reproduction in the present, but also for exploring their various ideas about social order, the past, theological/ideological core matters, and in which fluidity and diversity of constructions, often in logical tension among

It is worth stressing that within the ideological world of these literati *tôrâ* stood for *their* own, Jerusalem/Jerusalem temple-centered, understanding/social construction of divine *tôrâ*. Given that the literati imagined themselves as a group constituted around authoritative written texts, a cultural, systemic need emerged among them for the presence of a strongly Jerusalem/Jerusalem temple-centered (and thus, David-centered, to an extent) authoritative textual repertoire to inform and shape the understanding of core texts such as those included in the Pentateuch which were not textually inscribed as Jerusalem/Jerusalem-centred texts, because they emerged in collaboration with Samaritans and were shared with them. Most of the non-Pentateuchal book in the Yehudite authoritative repertoire mentioned above, including obviously Chronicles, served very well these purposes. To put it differently, within a self-construed text-centered, Jerusalem temple-centered community, the presence of a shared text required a non-shareable reading of it, and thus required the existence of a substantial authoritative repertoire to reflect, generate, support, and make “natural” such un-shareable reading. In other words, historians dealing with the world of thought and literature of these literati stand before an outstanding example of a “mental library” and of the systemic roles that such a “library” may play, at least in a particular group. It goes without saying that the authoritative, textual repertoire of these late Persian/early Hellenistic Yehudite literati may have included some books to which contemporary historians have no access. But given that (a) the books and collections mentioned at the beginning of this note existed among the literati of the late Persian/early Hellenistic period, in some textual form or forms more-or-less similar to those historians have access, (b) the small number of literati in Yehud, their shared socialization, the scarcity of resources necessary for developing and maintaining the high literacy necessary to produce and re-produce both the mentioned corpus and the literati themselves, and (c) the already existing, very substantial number of authoritative books along with both their wide variety and impressive multivocality, which are even more remarkable given the small number of literati and the scarce resources in Yehud, it is very *unlikely* that (d) there existed among these literati an even larger, additional, completely unattested, but highly complex, corpus of authoritative texts that was so *drastically different* from the one mentioned above to the point of making the latter completely unrepresentative even as an approximation to the mental library of the said literati. For a more substantial discussion of these matters and additional arguments in favor of the above conclusion see, e. g., E. Ben Zvi, *Social Memory Among the Literati of Yehud*, passim and previous literature.

Needless to say, the social, political, cultural, economic, demographic (and so on) situation in late Second Temple period Judah was extremely different from that of the poor and marginal Yehud of the Persian/early Hellenistic, and simplistic comparisons between the two periods should be avoided.

- each other, easily co-existed, because they had no 'operative' applications in the present, except to favor and perform social, horizontal cohesion;
- (c) a historical reconstruction in which (i) there were few Levites, (ii) Levites were neither among the central or powerful groups, nor were engaged in an ongoing confrontation with the priests, and (iii) the most severe, practical/this worldly challenges to 'proper' order were far more likely to come via interventions of political authorities outside the group, authorities that were unlikely to be swayed by texts they could not read (cf. *Ant.* 11.297–301).³⁰

The default position within this approach is that when substantial references to Levites occur in a book (or section thereof) within that repertoire and mental library, one has to explain why they appear in this one, unlike all the others. Or phrased slightly differently, why did Levites populate the world of imagination and memory evoked through reading this book (or section thereof) unlike the others? Within these parameters, the first research question related to our topic would be: why do Levites not only populate the monarchic world shaped by Chronicles, but are widely-found inhabitants who play important roles in the book, unlike in the other books that shaped images of that period among the literati?

By looking into the difference that the inclusion of Chronicles in the mentioned library made to the literati's memory-scape on this matter, we may begin to consider which issues this difference was meant to address. Moreover, since Chronicles rarely does only one 'thing,' it is important to investigate what references to Levites in Chronicles did help the literati to explore, and how these

30 The replacement of the top-leader of a sub-altern group by the dominant one constitutes one of the most impactful challenges to 'proper' order from a sub-altern perspective. Moreover, the challenge becomes much more problematic when the subaltern sees itself as organized around a cultic/religious central institution, in which case the replacement not only affects 'ordinary' aspects of the life of the group, but also interferes with its ability to carry out properly the kind of cultic activities deemed necessary for the proper maintenance of the cosmos, in addition to the very existence of the group. Inner struggle leading to foreign intervention in the leadership in the temple was construed and remembered as an ominous danger for Judah and its Jerusalemite temple during the Second Temple period. The appointment of the Jerusalem High Priest by a foreign king, of course, remained a problem for the legitimacy of the Maccabean priests, which was dealt with in various ways that cannot be discussed here. It is worth noting that Ezra was not imagined or remembered as a High Priest in Ezra-Nehemiah for this reason, despite being depicted as the most pious, and prominent priest, and despite its extended, legitimizing genealogy (Ezra 7:2–5). The reason for this approach to remembering Ezra is, likely, that construing him as High Priest would have raised an indirect potential implication of a royal Persian appointment. In contrast in 1 Esd 9:39, 40, 49, Ezra is referred to as the High Priest. This shift serves as a testimony for the underlying changes in historical and discursive circumstances. These matters, however, require a separate discussion.

matters and references may relate to other generative grammars of memory at work in the book. For obvious reasons, it is impossible to address all these issues in full in a single chapter, but a few, significant observations can be advanced.

Before doing so, I want to make clear that in what follows, I will not be proposing *sufficient* and *necessary* causes. Such proposals raise too many conceptual questions and evoke the dangerous phantom of historical determinism. Instead, I will focus on *factors* that facilitated the construction of the Levites in the world shaped by Chronicles and seem to be at work in various forms in Chronicles as a whole, both in relation and not in relation to matters of Levites. This is because potential facilitating factors that are proposed only as an *ad hoc* response to a single issue (in this case, the presence of so many references to Levites) are by definition problematic.

The most important facilitating factor, in my opinion, is the widespread tendency in Chronicles to contribute to a ‘normalization’ of social memory as it concerns the monarchic period. By this I am referring to the tendency of Chronicles to edge memories of the monarchic period towards better alignment with expectations raised by, and within the world of knowledge and social mindscape of the literati among whom the book emerged. Thus, for instance, when the literati imagined the monarchic past of Judah through their reading of Kings, they failed to see individual prophets prophesying in the kingdom between the establishment of the temple and the period of Hezekiah. Moreover, when they were transported to their monarchic period of memory through readings of the prophetic books, the same thing happened. Chronicles, as is well-known, ‘normalized’ matters by populating this lengthy period within the monarchic era with memorable prophets. In other words, it edged the comprehensive social memory of the literati towards a closer alignment with expectations.³¹

Similarly, the world conjured by reading Kings was not that deuteronomistic,³² or, as was important by that time, Pentateuchal. Chronicles edged these memories towards normalization. Likewise, by drawing attention away from the misdeeds and sins of David, Chronicles contributed to a construction of the ‘builder’ of the temple that is more aligned with common expectations of such builders.³³ Exam-

³¹ I elaborated on these matters in my “Chronicles and its Reshaping of Memories of Monarchic Period Prophets: Some Observations,” in *Prophets, Prophecy, and Ancient Israelite Historiography*, ed. Mark J. Boda and Lissa M. Wray Beal (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 167–88.

³² Cf., e. g., Gary N. Knoppers, “The Relationship of the Deuteronomistic History to Chronicles: Was the Chronicler a Deuteronomist?,” in *Congress Volume. Helsinki 2010*, VTSup 148, ed. Martti Nissinen (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 307–41.

³³ Cf. with the construction of Solomon, the builder of the temple in Kings, and notice that his ‘unfaithful’ actions as portrayed 1 Kgs 11 were set well after he built the temple, when he was old and his abilities were severely diminished.

ples of this tendency in Chronicles, large and small, may be multiplied (e.g., 1 Chr 18:17 and cf. 2 Sam 8:18). Although Chronicles does not construe a world as it ‘should have been,’ it edges social memory to imagine and remember things in terms more consistent with expectations generated by the world of knowledge and the social mindscape of the literati.

Directly pertinent to our case, the worlds of imagination about the monarchic past evoked by Samuel and Kings and the prophetic books could not but raise a nagging question about the Levites among the literati. Levites played important roles in what they thought to be the foundational period (see esp. Numbers) and Levites as separate from, but alongside priests, are to play roles in the future (see esp. Isa 66:21; and cf. Ezek 40–48). They may have been able to ‘live with’ the scarcity of Levites in their own historical situation; after all, they had no alternative. But what about Levites in their ideal monarchic period, especially during the foundational time of the temple, i.e., the Davidic-Solomonic period? What about their remembered times of restoration, such as those associated with Jehoshaphat, Joash, Hezekiah and Josiah? Or what about the regulations by David that complemented Moses’ *tôrâ*, and which together set the ‘proper temple rules’ for all times (2 Chr 23:18)? Or the majestic and most memorable (Davidic) performance of bringing the Ark up to Jerusalem?

When late-Persian, Yehudite literati engaged in vicarious time-travel and experienced all these crucial events, all they knew would have led them to expect to see Levites, in fact many of them, alongside priests. Chronicles ‘normalizes’ social memory by fulfilling their expectations. In all these cases, Levites appear and play significant roles in Chronicles.³⁴

Of course, as in all other instances of ‘normalization,’ Chronicles asked the readers to construe a world with its own flavours. In the case of the Levites, Chronicles, as demonstrated more than twenty years ago by Gary N. Knoppers,³⁵ has its own construction of the roles of the Levites, which is distinct from those of all other books and texts within the authoritative repertoire of the literati, including, e.g., Deuteronomy, the relevant portions of Numbers, the relevant portions of Ezekiel.³⁶ As such, Chronicles contributed, here and elsewhere, to a communal

³⁴ See, e.g., 2 Chr 4; 7:6; 8:14–15; 17:8; 19:8, 11; 23–24; 29–31; 34.

³⁵ Gary N. Knoppers, “Hierodules, Priests, or Janitors? The Levites in Chronicles and the History of the Israelite Priesthood,” *JBL* 118 (1999): 49–72.

³⁶ Of course, there is a lengthy history of scholarship that attempts to separate the relevant texts in Chronicles into distinct layers and redactions, each shaped to be more logically consistent with assumed pro-priestly or pro-levitical groups and more consistent with other texts. For a discussion, in addition to Knoppers, “Hierodules,” see, e.g., Matthew Lynch, *Monotheism and Institutions in the Book of Chronicles*, FATI 64 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 140–48. I have

imagination and a shared memory of the monarchic period among the literati that was strongly characterized by multivocality, fuzziness and acceptance of various, seemingly contradictory images. The mentioned multivocality contributed to the richness of their discourse and served them well to explore ideas through multiple perspectives, scenarios and partial memories. Significantly, the general socio-cultural tendency towards multivocality, works well with (intellectual) groups devoid of existential anxiety and that, due to their (sub-altern) social location, tend to involve themselves in shaping worlds of imagination concerning the past (and future), rather than practically exercising much political agency.³⁷ The very scarcity of Levites in the present, beyond likely singers and perhaps gatekeepers, facilitated acts of imagining them in the past (or future).

The very fact that Chronicles mentions Levites far more than any other book in the late-Yehudite (or early Hellenistic) repertoire was facilitated by another indisputable factor: namely the centrality of the Temple, and of human performances at the temple in Chronicles.

That said, although time travelling to the world of Chronicles indeed meant meeting Levites far more often than mentally travelling to the world portrayed in any other book of the literati's repertoire, it also meant meeting many more priests. Actually, priests and Levites served in Chronicles as a most common type for the "Complementary Other." Priests and Levites appear as separate, but complementary groups numerous times in the main historical narrative (e. g., 2 Chr 7:6; 13:10; 17:7–9; 19:8; 23:4–8; 29; 31:4, 9, 17–19; 35:2–3). Neither priests alone nor Levites alone could carry out the service of the Temple. But complementarity does not mean a lack of hierarchy. Chronicles clearly conveys a sense of hierarchy between the two (e. g., 1 Chr 16:39–40; 26:18 and esp. 1 Chr 23:28).³⁸

argued often and extensively against the tendency to first create multiple layers and sources so as to have univocal texts, and then construct an historical group with a consistent voice (and a coherent inner-logic, in our terms) to whom one may assign authorial agency, or vice versa. The fact is that all the "biblical" texts, and prominently among them, Chronicles, are multivocal and sustain inner (logical) tensions, and often stand in tension with other books within the same repertoire. From a historical perspective focused on how the community read these books, these are key features of these books, whatever forerunners they might or might not have had. In addition, the omnipresence of these features in this repertoire strongly suggests that there existed a strong generative grammar that preferred books with such features.

³⁷ Cf. the Seleucid period, 'Babylonian' repertoire; the sages responsible for the Mishna.

³⁸ There has been some debate on the meaning of 1 Chr 23:28 (בית לעבדתו ליד בני אהרן לעבדת בית האלהים), which is a key-text on this issue, and particularly on the meaning of ליד within the context of Chronicles. The most similar instance of its use here in this book is in 1 Chr 18:17 (בניהו בן יהוידע על הכרתי והפלתי ובני דויד) and here, as in 1 Chr 23:28, whether one translates X ליד "at the side of X"

Significantly, although Chronicles resorts here and there to the notional concept of a “Proximate Other,”³⁹ only the “Complementary Other” is ubiquitous in this work,⁴⁰ which is only a reflection of the value attached to social cohesion (see above).

As hinted to above, the very concept of complementarity went hand in hand in Chronicles – and in the general social mindscape of the literati – with a strong acceptance of social hierarchies and the construction of their maintenance as a key structuring, ordering factor in the world. In fact, piety in this world included accepting the structuring order and maintaining it.⁴¹ Particularly in light of the literati’s knowledge of the revolt of Korah, the Levite, and Dathan and Abiram and On, son of Peleth, against Moses and Aaron (Num 16), it is worth keeping in mind that the Levites populating so much of the world of Chronicles were never construed as threatening the main roles of the priests, or the ‘proper’ order of society, and needless to say, Moses and *tōrâ*. Within the world of Chronicles, the threat to the status of the priests (and from the literati’s perspective, the proper, and even cosmic, order) was imagined in the sphere of political power (see the case of Uzziah in 2 Chr 26:16–21, cf. Babylonian texts from Seleucid period). Of course, imagining that the true threat was to be found in political power in the context of

or not, the clear connotation is X is hierarchically higher than to the other individual or groups mentioned in this context.

39 See my forthcoming contributions to *About Edom and Idumea in the Persian Period: Recent Research and Approaches from Archaeology, Hebrew Bible Studies and Ancient Near East Studies*, eds. Benedikt Hensel, Ehud Ben Zvi, and Diana V. Edelman. WANEM (London: Equinox, forth. 2022).

40 For instance, in Chronicles, kings and officers and even the people are often portrayed as working together in harmony and existing in complementarity, at times with negative outcomes, but still complementarity. According to Sara Japhet, this ubiquitous feature of the historical narratives in Chronicles might be understood in terms of a ‘democratizing’ trend. See S. Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and its Place in Biblical Thought*, 2nd rev. ed., BEATAJ 9 (Frankfurt am Main/New York: P. Lang, 1997), 417–28. It seems to me that complementarity within hierarchy (see also below) expresses more precisely the tendency (and generative grammar for the shaping of narratives and social memories) at work in Chronicles.

41 Thus, for instance, a pious priest such as Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, may warn the king and utter godly words, and die for that (2 Chr 24:17–22), but can only imagine himself as asking YHWH to observe the matter and draw conclusions (דָּרַשׁ). He cannot even think of taking upon himself the status of a Davidic king or usurping his roles and duties, for such an action would be utterly impious. His father, Jehoiada who is portrayed as close as possible to a royal (and pious) figure in the world of Chronicles (see esp. 2 Chr 24:15) – and thus prefiguring, the later communal leadership of the High Priest – could never have been imagined as unsettling the Davidic king and reigning in his stead. Within this world, pre-ordained, hierarchical structures had to be maintained, and what works for the line of Davidides works as well for the priests.

the Yehudite literati, meant construing it as external and requiring inner social cohesion among those responsible for the Temple to decrease the risk of external intervention (cf. *Ant.* 11.297–301).

That said, as significant as vertical social cohesion was in the world of Chronicles, it was placed in proportion by a complementary concept that vertical barriers are porous and flexible on some central axes and matters. Levites could, for instance, at times be remembered as behaving much better than priests (e.g., 2 Chr 29:34), without changing their prescribed roles. Whereas, due to the status of the priests and the realities of a late Persian/early Hellenistic Yehud, no Levite could be remembered as a *quasi*-king (unlike the priest Jehoida, see above) in monarchic Judah, the crucial role of serving as prophetic voices and thus guarding Israel was open to them (see 2 Chr 20:14, and in their roles as singers/performers), just as it was open to priests, kings, and anyone else, with some restrictions.⁴²

A final observation to matters of complementarity is that, as the imagined and remembered monarchic period fades away in Chronicles, and Zedekiah completely disappears from the text (2 Chr 36:13), incipient features of post-monarchic Yehud begin to emerge in Chronicles. The focus on the leadership shifts from the complementarity of king (and ‘his leading officers,’ שָׂרִים) and people, to the complementarity of שְׂרֵי הַכֹּהֲנִים (‘the leaders of the priests’) and the people. As the priests begin to be characterized as the internal leaders of the community, Levites disappear; precisely, because both at that moment in the world of Chronicles, as in historical late-Yehud (or Ben-Sira’s Judah, for that matter), Levites as such are not to be found as complementary partners to the priests’ in-group, temple-centered communal leadership.

An additional facilitating factor was that Chronicles emphasizes performances and particularly public performances, which it saw as constitutive of the community. Thus, in the world of Chronicles, the temple singers were particularly important.⁴³ Moreover, when the literati empathetically visited this world of

42 On matters of guardianship, prophetic voices and political thought, see Ehud Ben Zvi, “Memory and Political Thought in the Late Persian/Early Hellenistic Yehud/Judah: Some Observations,” in *Leadership, Social Memory and Judean Discourse in the 5th–2nd Centuries BCE*, WANEM, ed. Diana V. Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi (London: Equinox, 2016), 9–26. As for the restrictions, slaves, for instance, were not included among the prophetic voices, no women served in these roles in Chronicles, except for Hulda in 2 Chr 34:22–28, probably a non-malleable ‘fact’ agreed upon among the literati (cf. 2 Kgs 22:14–20). The question of which ‘facts’ appearing in Kings (or other relevant texts within the authoritative repertoire of the literati) the Chronicler could not change, and why these ones, requires a separate study.

43 On the Levitical singers in Chronicles, see Ming Him Ko, *The Levite Singers in Chronicles and their Stabilizing Role*, LHBOTS 657 (London: T&T Clark, 2017).

memory, they could not but engage in some conceptual slippage between singer, performer, author/writer and even prophet (cf. 1 Chr 25:1; 2 Chr 34:13).⁴⁴

This slippage, of course, is not restricted to Chronicles, but is well-attested in Chronicles and carried important implications for its construction of the Levites. For one, it created a general realm of meaning that could be activated and associated with Levites; thus a Levite could exist within the world of imagination and memory evoked by Chronicles as singers, a prophetic voice, and as scribes (1 Chr 24:6;⁴⁵ 2 Chr 34:13), and therefore also as people responsible for some areas of the administration, including the roles of שטרים (see 1 Chr 23:4; 26:29; 2 Chr 19:11). To be sure, Levites were not the only ones performing these duties. Scribes did not have to be Levites (see 2 Chr 2:55), even a foreign monarch could serve as a prophetic voice, and so on. Even musicians playing instruments in the cult were not exclusively Levites (see the priests with the trumpets in 2 Chr 29:26). But Levites could indeed be imagined as singers, ‘gatekeepers’ and as fulfilling all these positions.

The more a site of memory serves as a playground for safely exploring some key issues within the ideological discourse of the remembering groups, the more it would tend to populate the memory-scape of a group. Levites served as an excellent playground to point at and even embody some key temporal trajectories and explore their significance. For instance, the Levites were supposed to live all over the country and in some Levitical cities. But, according to Chronicles, the Levites left the territory of the northern Kingdom and settled in Judah at the time of Rehoboam (2 Chr 11:13–14). This complete spatial transfer served as a manifestation of a larger issue, the turning of ‘Israel’ into Yehud/Judah and ‘the land’ into the land of monarchic Judah.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Cf. my previous work, Ehud Ben Zvi, “Who Knew What? The Construction of the Monarchic Past in Chronicles and Implications for the Intellectual Setting of Chronicles,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Fourth Century B.C.E.*, ed. Oded Lipschits, Gary N. Knoppers and R. Albertz (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 349–60; “Observations on Lines of Thought Concerning the Concepts of Prophecy and Prophets in Yehud, with an Emphasis on Deuteronomy-2Kings and Chronicles,” in *Words, Ideas, Worlds. Biblical Essays in Honour of Yairah Amit*, Hebrew Bible Monographs, 40, ed. Athalya Brenner and Frank H. Polak, (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012), 1–19; “Chronicles and its Reshaping of Memories.”

⁴⁵ Note what the Levite scribe records according to this text, and the complementarity rather than competition between priests and Levites that this text suggests.

⁴⁶ This conceptual theme appears in various ways in Chronicles. I have recently explored its significance for Chronicles’ dealings with the notion of Israel as the ‘twelve tribes of Jacob’ in my “Chronicles and the Concept of ‘The Twelve Tribes of Israel’,” to be published in a forthcoming memorial book.

Needless to say, this is not the only case in which the Levites of memory shaped and filled a space for exploring important issues in the discourse of the literati. Perhaps the most obvious one concerns the minimum age at which Levites could be counted in a census. According to Numbers 4:3, at the time of Moses and Aaron, that age was thirty years old (and see also 1 Chr 23:3 in reference to the time of David), but according to 1 Chronicles 23:24–27, David changed the minimum age to twenty, which in Chronicles seems to have been the standard age for assuming full adult responsibilities. This change, which is clearly approved by Chronicles, serves as an excellent ground to explore cases of some ‘Mosaic’ laws that were deemed to be temporarily contingent.⁴⁷ Of course, the same holds true, *inter alia*, for the rules of the Passover at the time of the Exodus, within the imaginary of the literati.

More observations may be advanced, but the preceding ones suffice to illustrate the kind of potential outcomes that the approach outlined above may offer in terms of addressing the social roles and effects of remembering Levites in the context of the world/s of the past conjured by Chronicles, and why Levites populated the world of Chronicles so much, unlike the case in most other books in the authoritative repertoire of the community, and particularly those conjuring the monarchic past. In addition, the preceding observations illustrate ways in which the emergence of Chronicles altered to an extent the comprehensive memory-scape of the literati, and even more importantly, the dynamic character of the social memory system at work among the literati.

Obviously, had their world of memory reflected *only* the monarchic past evoked by the books of Samuel and Kings and the relevant prophetic books, their image of monarchic period Levites would have been drastically different. But, as shown here and by multiple other cases, the main generative grammar at work among these literati showed a strong dis-preference for across the board homogenization, both at the inner- and inter-book/collection level.⁴⁸ The authoritative

⁴⁷ I discussed this example with bibliography in Ehud Ben Zvi, “One Size Does Not Fit All. Observations on the Different Ways That Chronicles Dealt with the Authoritative Literature of Its Time,” in *What Was Authoritative for Chronicles?*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi and Diana V. Edelman (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 13–35.

⁴⁸ There was indeed a consistent preference for keeping inconsistency at the inner-book level and at the level of core sites of memory (e. g., Moses). I discussed these matters in E. Ben Zvi, *Social Memory Among the Literati of Yehud*, *passim*, and literature. The same holds true at the inter-book or inter-collection of books levels. No one would doubt that, for instance, that Josiah is the main hero of the (separate, kingdom of Judah) in the world portrayed and communicated by Kings, but no one “updated” the book of Zephaniah to include a positive image of Josiah in it. Similarly, no one “updated” the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel so as to have the two characters interacting with other, despite the fact that both were remembered as living in more or less the period. Examples can be easily multiplied.

repertoire and the memory-scape of the literati were both consistently characterized by a multiplicity of voices and of imagined and remembered pasts and futures, interacting and informing each other. In our case, Chronicles, the mentioned prophetic books and Samuel-Kings each kept recalling their own particular monarchic past/s, and, as a result, the literati kept “seeing” or “not-seeing” Levites as they time-traveled to these respective pasts.

At the same time, the literati’s mental library and general world of knowledge could not but keep informing their readings of any book in that library, and in our case, also the images of the past that they conjured. Acts of “not seeing” were thus performed time and again against background knowledge and vicarious experiences of “seeing” and vice-versa, and thus causing, by necessity from a systemic viewpoint, ongoing interpretative loops and raising significant questions.⁴⁹ Moreover, since the literati read and were fully aware of both texts conjuring different pasts and vicariously, due to empathy, “experienced” these diverse “past realities”, their comprehensive memory-scape was unequivocally, strongly multiperspectival, dynamic, continuously self-balancing, and self-complementing.

This paper has focused on the contribution that Chronicles made to the shaping of memories of the Levites of the monarchic period among the literati of the Late Persian/early Hellenistic period, and on factors that facilitated the particular character of the memories of Levites that this book encoded and conjured. It also represents an invitation to reconsider common positions about the Levites in late-Persian Yehud and explore additional research paths, which may apply to Chronicles, as shown above, but perhaps may also be helpful to study other texts, books or sections within books in which the Levites play an important role either in the foundational past or the utopian future, and which existed alongside all the other books within the authoritative repertoire of the historical literati of the period and were all integral to their mental library.⁵⁰

49 On these matters see my “Chronicles and Samuel-Kings: Two Interacting Aspects of one Memory System in the Late Persian/Early Hellenistic Period,” in *Rereading the Relecture? The Question of (Post)chronistic Influence in the Latest Redactions of the Books of Samuel*, ed. Uwe Becker and Hannes Bezzel (FAT II, 66; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 41–56, and *Social Memory Among the Literati of Yehud*, 317–331 and *passim*.

50 I wish to express my appreciation to the organizers of the original workshop and the editors of this volume for inviting me, for their hospitality and friendship, but above all, for their leadership in shaping a friendly atmosphere in which multiple positions are collaboratively aired and discussed and in which we can all learn from each other. I want to express my appreciation to all the other participants for their contributions and comments on my own work. Scholarship and knowledge production are, by necessity, collaborative projects. My thanks to all those involved in this one.