Research Article

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The Fall of Jerusalem: Cultural Trauma as a Process

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Abstract: Cultural trauma theory provides a framework for studying the socio-cultural process which takes place between an event and its (socially accepted) representation. This article will apply the process-oriented approach of cultural trauma theory to studying biblical narratives of the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem, focusing in particular on the destruction and pillage of the temple. The comparison of the various accounts of the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem, and of their different versions transmitted in Hebrew and in Greek, reveals that the memory of this event was by no means unified and developed over a longer period of time. Discussing passages from 2 Kgs 24–25 and their parallels in the book of Jeremiah, this article will argue that the devastation of the temple of Jerusalem, which is often regarded as a major traumatizing event in the history of ancient Judah, became remembered as such only as the result of a longer process.

Keywords: Hebrew Bible, trauma theory, temple destruction, 587 BCE, temple vessels, 2 Kings 25, Jeremiah 39, Jeremiah 52

1 Introduction

"Memory is a river, one that always runs backward"
(Paulo Coelho, *The Spy*, Westminster 2016)

Most of the time, when the hermeneutics of trauma are applied in biblical studies, the trauma is related to events of the Babylonian period. The fall of Jerusalem and its aftermath, in particular the Babylonian exile, are considered particularly traumatizing, leaving traces of traumatic response in the biblical texts.

While the manifold uses of trauma approaches in such studies share the view that the trauma has something to do with the *memory* of the Babylonian conquest and exile, the relation between traumatizing experience, traumatic memory, and the biblical text remains often unclear. Should we assume that biblical texts have been written by traumatized authors or for a traumatized audience? Such approaches commonly focus on memory as a river that flows forward: it flows naturally from the event as its source, it can be diluted and distorted, but in its essence bears the trace of the original experience. Implicitly at least, such approaches often draw on elements of individual psychological trauma. However, in light of the complex literary history of biblical texts, and considering that they are skillful literary texts, it can be quite misleading to read them through the lens of individual psychological trauma.[1]

1 For a modern example cautioning against the delusion that readers can detect "authentic experience" in a literary work, see the moving autobiography of holocaust survivor Binjamin Wilkomirski, which in actual fact was written by the Swiss Bruno Dösseker. Regarding the issue of the literary history of biblical texts as a challenge to readings through the lens of psychological

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Cultural trauma provides us with a different perspective, which in my view can help us to be more precise and nuanced in the consideration of historical events, experiences of suffering, and the production and use of ancient Hebrew texts. Rather than reflecting experiences and transmitting emotions that flow from the source of the horrendous event, these texts participate in shaping a memory of past events. Cultural trauma theory precisely refers to the process that takes place between an event and its collective representation, that is, an image of the event shared by a group of people. As Amir Khadem puts it, "cultural trauma is a communal practice of historical hermeneutics."[2] The focus lies, so to speak, on memory as a river that flows backward – on the way people look back on and construe past events.

Cultural trauma, as a collective trauma, is not just the result of people individually experiencing pain. Rather, it refers to trauma in the collective memory of the group. If we leave the realm of poetic metaphors, a group does not have a physical body which can be hurt by a blow. Rather, a group is affected by interpersonal processes – social, political, cultural, in short: discursive processes. According to cultural trauma theory, the collective impact of a horrific event has to do with its shared representation, which is the result of such a process. To describe this process, Jeffrey Alexander speaks of "carrier groups" which "broadcast" certain representations of the events and "claims" concerning the "nature of the pain" and the "nature of the victim."[3] These claims provide answers to questions such as "what actually happened" and "what group of persons was affected by this traumatizing pain?"[4]

Applying this perspective to biblical literature relating to the fall of Jerusalem, we can ask: How did the fall of Jerusalem become a cultural trauma? More specifically, what claims were raised concerning the Babylonian conquest, and by whom? What is the master narrative of suffering that became widely established through this representational process?

In this article, I will approach these questions using as a starting point the parallel accounts of the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem in the books of Kings and Jeremiah. These accounts – although they are almost verbatim parallels – differ considerably in their representation of the devastation of Jerusalem and the deportation of its population. The variations in these accounts allow us to see that there is no such thing as a unified representation of events, that the claims as to what happened were not uncontested, and that the conventional narrative of suffering developed only over time.

In particular, I will focus on the devastation and pillage of the temple of Jerusalem. The destruction of the temple is often considered a major traumatizing event, profoundly affecting Judean history, culture, and religion and leaving an indelible mark on Judean identity.[5] However, as I will show in the following, this is rather the result of a longer process of memory construction.

2 Parallel accounts in Kgs and Jer

The account of the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem in 2 Kgs 24–25 provides a fruitful starting point for an examination of the development of the narrative, since there are several texts in the Hebrew Bible that are almost identical verbal parallels to this account, allowing for a close examination of differences and possible developments in telling the story of the fall of Jerusalem.[6] The account of the second Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem under Zedekiah in 2 Kgs 24:18–25:21, 27–30, including the subsequent destruction,

trauma, see the critical remarks by Holt, "Daughter Zion," 164–5. Else Holt, to my knowledge, was among the first biblical scholars to draw on cultural trauma theory.

2 Khadem, "Cultural Trauma," 187.

3 See Alexander, "Toward a Theory," 11–5.

4 Ibid., 13.

5 This conception is reflected in terminology such as "Judaism of the First Temple" vs "Second Temple Judaism," or Middlemas' designation of the period between 587 and 515 as the "Templeless Age," see Middlemas, *Templeless*.

6 See also Ammann, "Second Kings," where I deal in more detail with the relation between the parallel accounts and how they can be studied as witnesses to a process of cultural memory.

pillage, and deportations, has an almost word-for-word parallel in Jer 52:1–27, 31–34. Moreover, part of this same account has a further parallel in Jer 39:1–10 (//2 Kgs 25:1–12//Jer 52:4–16). In addition, the Hebrew and Greek texts of Jeremiah show significant differences, including the fact that Jer 39:1–2, 4–10 are not represented in the Greek text.[7] We can, therefore, compare four different versions of the account[8]: 2 Kgs 24–25 MT; Jer 52 MT, Jer 52 OG, and Jer 39 MT.

I will briefly sketch the compositional (literary-historical) relations between these texts that I presuppose in the following. Except for 2 Kgs 25:22–26, which is based on the longer account of Gedaliah's assassination in Jer 40–41, the account of the fall of Jerusalem in 2 Kgs 24:18–25:30 originated in the book of Kings and was copied from there to Jer 52.[9] This can be seen from the first verses, which clearly betray the typical language of the regnal formulas in the book of Kings, but also from other elements like the list of temple vessels, which refers back to 1 Kgs 7 (as I will discuss below).[10]

As is well known, the Old Greek version of the book of Jeremiah attests a significantly shorter text as compared to the Masoretic text. Nowadays, there is broad agreement among scholars that the shorter Greek version generally represents an earlier Hebrew form of the text, which I will call (with Hermann–Josef Stipp) the Alexandrian text (JerAlT).[11] With regard to Jeremiah 39 and 52, detailed analyses of the differences between the Greek and Hebrew texts and of the translation technique confirm the view that the shorter text attested in Greek reflects an earlier Hebrew *Vorlage* and that the Masoretic text of these chapters represents a later stage of their textual development.[12]

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7 The editions by Rahlfs and Hanhart, *Septuaginta*; and Ziegler, *Ieremias*, include Jer 39:1–2 (46:1–2 LXX) as represented in the Old Greek; however, a convincing case for these verses lacking in the earlier manuscript tradition is made by Bogaert, "*Vetus Latina*," 59f.; de Waard, *Jeremiah 52*, 92 n. 288.

8 For the purposes of this essay, I am leaving aside the Old Greek text of 2 Kgs 24–25 which shows little difference with the Masoretic text. For a discussion of the differences, see Müller et al., *Evidence*, 109–14, and the studies on the parallel accounts by Person, *Kings*; de Waard, *Jeremiah 52*.

9 The account of the governor Gedaliah and his assassination in 2 Kgs 25:22–26 closely parallels several verses from the larger account in Jeremiah 40–41 (Jer 40:7–9 and 41:1–3, see, also, Jer 41:18; 42:7). The shorter account in 2 Kgs 25:22–26 most likely is an excerpt from Jeremiah, since it draws on passages which seem to belong to various redactional stages of Jeremiah and which are closely tied to their respective literary contexts there. See Stipp, *Jeremia im Parteienstreit*, 182–8, and Pohlmann, *Studien*, 109–22, 134. Jer 52 does not include these verses. In addition, some details in 2 Kgs 24:18–25:30 (e.g., the names of the priests in 2 Kgs 25:18; the gloss in 2 Kgs 25:8) are better explained as a result of secondary harmonization of the account in Kings with Jer 52, see de Waard, *Jeremiah 52*, 91; Ammann, "Second Kings," 24f.

10 See de Waard, *Jeremiah 52*, 35f.

11 A reversal of the earlier view (attributing the shorter Greek text to abbreviation by the translator) was brought about esp. by Janzen, *Studies*, who analyzed the translation technique of the Greek translator, the character of the Masoretic pluses, and published evidence of a shorter Hebrew text of Jeremiah in the Dead Sea Scrolls, demonstrating that the shorter Greek text was based on a shorter Hebrew *Vorlage* (see also Stipp, *Sondergut*, 7–58; Tov, "Literary History," 363f; Shead, "Text," 261–3). The longer text of JerMT is the result of secondary expansion of a shorter Hebrew text close to this *Vorlage*, as the additional material in JerMT can be plausibly explained as secondary additions (e.g., addition of names, titles, place names, speech formula) and has "a distinct linguistic profile, with relatively many late features" (de Waard, *Jeremiah 52*, 37). See Stipp, *Sondergut*, 66–144. In particular, Stipp has shown that there are many linguistic features (concerning terminology, style, and grammar) that are attested several times in Masoretic pluses but never in the shorter text (see Stipp, "Prämasoretische Idiolekt," for the most up-to-date list listing 87 items; for an earlier list in English, see Stipp, "Linguistic Peculiarities"). An intentional removal or modification is unlikely, since the purpose of such a redaction cannot be plausibly explained (what would the redactor have taken exception to?). Rather, the additional material in JerMT points toward later reworking and amending of the text. See Stipp, *Sondergut*, 141–4; Stipp, "Prämasoretische Idiolekt," 119–23; Shead, "Text," 264–71; and the references provided in the next footnote.

12 See Bogaert, "Trois Formes;" Bogaert, "*Vetus Latina*;" Person, "II Kings;" Person, *Kings*; Smith, "Jeremiah;" de Waard, *Jeremiah 52*; Stipp, *Jeremia im Parteienstreit*; Stipp, *Jeremia 25–52*; Frohlich, *Relationship*. The opposite view defended by Fischer, "Jeremia 52," has been convincingly refuted by Engel, "Erfahrungen," 84–93; de Waard, *Jeremiah 52*, 39–44; Frohlich and de Waard, "Text."

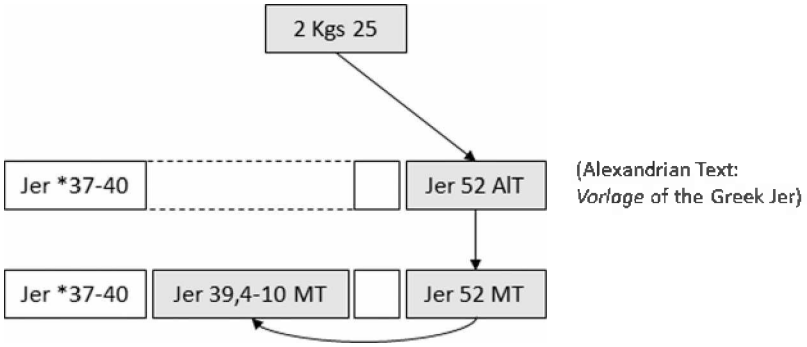

Figure 1: Schematic representation of the chronological order and literary relations of the four parallel accounts presupposed in the following.

The account of the Babylonian conquest in Jer 39:1–2, 4–10, which has no equivalent in the Old Greek, is most likely a secondary addition to its present context.[13] Minor variants of the text show that it is based on Jer 52 (rather than 2 Kgs 25)[14].

These four accounts of the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem, which are for their major part a kind of copy-and-paste parallel, differ from each other in minor details, but also in elements which traditionally seem more central. Not all of them record a deportation of the people or a destruction of the temple. Moreover, a closer examination of the base text in Kgs indicates that this account itself is a composition that shows traces of reworking. The parallel accounts of the fall of Jerusalem provide us, therefore, with important clues on the different ways in which this event was remembered and how the trauma narrative developed. While the variability of the accounts can also be appreciated without agreeing to this presupposed sequence (Figure 1), the literary-historical picture adds the dimension of a diachronic development, which is important to my understanding of a cultural trauma.

In the following, I will focus on three variations concerning the devastation and pillage of the temple, which illustrate that the focus on the temple in many accounts (biblical as well as contemporary) of the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem is the result of a cultural process.

3 Variations concerning the date of the devastation of the temple

The first variation concerns the date of the devastation of the temple. The account in Kings records the capture of Jerusalem and the devastation of the city as two separate events, that is, they are set apart by a marked temporal distance and a change in the protagonists involved. The capture of Jerusalem took place, according to 2 Kgs 25:3, on the 9th day of the month. The relevant month is not mentioned, most likely due to a scribal error.[15] The devastation of the city, including the burning of the temple, is not a consequence of the conquest by the Babylonian army, but a punishing measure taking place somewhat later and with a new protagonist, the Babylonian officer Nebuzaradan. According to 2 Kgs 25:8, Nebuzaradan came to Jerusalem on the 7th day of the 5th month. Jer 52:12, in contrast, records the 10th day of the same month. Recently, Henk de Waard has proposed an explanation of this difference. Since 2 Kgs 25:3 (and correspondingly also the Alexandrian text of Jer 52:6) does not indicate the relevant month, the date provided there for the capture of Jerusalem is ambiguous.[16] As de Waard argues,

13 See Stipp, *Jeremia im Parteienstreit*, 176–7; de Waard, *Jeremiah 52*, 91–3; Bogaert, "Libération."
14 See de Waard, *Jeremiah 52*, 93–4; Lipschits, *Fall and Rise*, 337 n. 250.
15 See de Waard, *Jeremiah 52*, 55.
16 Corrected only in JerMT, probably under the influence of Zech 8:19, see ibid.

> This ambiguity may well have caused a scribe to suppose that the city was captured and destroyed in the same month (namely the fifth, v. 12), which then led him to postdate the destruction by some days, in order not to have the city destroyed (on the seventh of the month) before it was captured (on the ninth of the month).[17]

Two insights can be drawn from this difference regarding the dates. First, the difference shows that the date of the destruction of the temple was not yet remembered as a fixed date. The precise date does not even seem especially relevant, since it could be corrected quite freely – on "logical" grounds – by a scribe in Jer 52:12 AlT and was transmitted without harmonization in Kings and Jeremiah. As a matter of fact, various dates for the temple destruction circulated in antiquity.[18] The Peshitta and some medieval Hebrew manuscripts of Kings would change the date to the 9th of the month – in relation with the celebration of Tisha B'Av – but even in early rabbinic times, this date was still contested.[19] Second, the dating in Jer 52:12 AlT closes the temporal gap between the capture and the devastation of Jerusalem. The new protagonist Nebuzaradan enters the city just the next day after the capture. In this reading, the capture and devastation of the city, including the temple, move closer together. The temporal distance between these occurrences is narrowed in such a way that they appear as two scenes which are part of one and the same disastrous event.

While some biblical texts – including Jer 52 MT[20] – preserve a memory of the conquest and devastation of Jerusalem as two different events, the tendency observed in Jer 52 AlT to merge the events into one can also be seen in other biblical texts (see 2 Chr 36:17–20). This tendency can also be traced further in the shorter account of Jer 39, which lacks a separate dating for the devastation of the city.

Such a merging of several elements into a single, catastrophic event seems particularly relevant with regard to the shaping of a cultural trauma. There is a sharp distinction of life before and after the trauma. Rather than a continuous decline or a series of negative events, the fall of Jerusalem becomes remembered as a singular dramatic moment that changed the course of history and Judean identity.

4 Variations concerning the destruction of the temple

The difference of the dates already shed some doubts on the assumption that in Judean memory, the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem was unanimously singled out as a traumatizing event from early on. This is further corroborated by the fact that there is no particular emphasis on the destruction of the temple in the narratives in Kings and Jeremiah. The burning of the temple is mentioned in 2 Kgs 25:9//Jer 52:13 only in passing:[21]

> And he (=Nebuzaradan) burned the house of Yhwh (וישרף את־בית־יהוה) and the house of the king and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every big house he burned with fire.

There is no detailed account of its profanation and destruction, no account of what happens to its incombustible parts. Items which figure prominently in the account of the temple's building (such as the ark in 2 Kgs 8:1–11), or in the account of its re-building (such as the altar in Ezra 3:2–6), are not mentioned. Moreover, the condensed account in Jer 39 does not mention a destruction of the temple at all:[22]

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17 Ibid., 62.

18 See also Josephus, who provides two different dates (Ant. X 146: 1. Av; B.J. VI 250: 10. Av).

19 See Avioz, "Date of the Destruction."

20 On the date in Jer 52 MT, see de Waard, *Jeremiah 52*, 55.

21 For this observation, see also Wright, "Deportation," 120: "It is indeed remarkable that the destruction of the temple is mentioned in passing[...]. Rather than being of independent cultic or social-institutional significance, the temple appears here as part of society that is destroyed – a society that owes its existence to, and revolves around, the king."

22 See Seitz, *Theology in Conflict*, 270–1. An accidental omission is unlikely in view of how the corresponding verse in Jer 52:13 is paraphrased.

> And the Chaldeans burned the house of the king and the house[s?][23] of the people with fire (ואת־בית המלך ואת־בית העם שרפו הכשׂדים באשׁ). (Jer 39:8a)

Nebuzaradan, who has a more positive role in Jer 39 since he liberates Jeremiah from prison (Jer 39:11–14), is not charged with the destructions. The more Babylonian-friendly perspective of this narrative may be one reason why a destruction of the temple is not mentioned. Moreover, in the context of Jer 39, a destruction of the temple does not seem to be presupposed. Jer 41:5 mentions pilgrims from the north, bringing sacrificial gifts to the "house of Yhwh," that is, to the temple in Jerusalem.[24] Clearly, this story presupposes that cultic activity is still possible (whether the temple is damaged or not – but this is not the focus of the story).

These variations lead us to another insight regarding the process of cultural trauma: the destruction of the temple is not a necessary ingredient in the narrative of suffering. Even in a text like Jer 39, which is informed by texts that report the burning of the temple, it is still possible to summarize the events without reference to the temple. It is the devastation of the city as a whole which is relevant; the temple is not singled out in this narrative.[25]

In terms of cultural trauma, we could say that there is a variety of claims regarding the nature of the pain and the victims. At the time of writing these biblical texts, the shared image of the fall of Jerusalem is not – not yet? – a clear picture with definite traits and does not necessarily include the destruction of the temple.[26]

5 Variations concerning the pillage of the temple vessels

In light of the very brief mention of the burning of the temple in the narratives of Kings and Jeremiah, it is all the more striking how much detail is provided on the plundering of the temple vessels.

Second Kings 25:13–17 and Jer 52:17–23 provide long lists of temple vessels taken by the Babylonians. It seems, however, that these lists were not part of the earliest account of the Babylonian conquest, and that they were further expanded over time.

The account of the Babylonian conquest in 2 Kgs 25 is a composed text that underwent a process of literary development before it reached the form from which it was copied to Jer 52.[27] The list of temple vessels in 2 Kgs 25:13–17 is most likely a secondary addition to its present context, which was not part of the account of the conquest of Jerusalem in 2 Kgs 25 in its earlier form. Since already v. 9 refers to the temple being burned, the account of the plundering of the temple seems out of place and "interrupts the account about the fate of the population."[28]

There is no reason to assume – as some commentators think – that this list is taken from an ancient booty list.[29] The list of temple vessels in 2 Kgs 25:14–15 is based on temple vessels mentioned in the temple

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23 Most commentators interpret בית העם as an expression to summarize the houses mentioned in Jer 52:13b, either as a collective noun or by emending to the plural בתי, see McKane, *Jeremiah*, 978f.; Barthélemy, *Critique Textuelle*, 730f.; Stipp, *Jeremia 25–52*, 513.525.

24 As elsewhere in Jeremiah, see Fischer, *Jeremia 26–52*, 386. There is no reason to assume that the pilgrims go to a different place, since the story presupposes that Mizpah is not their aim – they only enter the place at the request of Ismael – and the dating in the 7th month (41:1) points to the celebration of Sukkot. See Duhm, *Jeremia*, 317f; McKane, *Jeremiah*, 1019; Stipp, *Jeremia 25–52*, 562f. Most interpreters assume that the signs of mourning refer to the destruction of the temple (e.g., McKane, Stipp), but there is no hint to this in the text, see Nevins, "Solomon's Temple," 8–9. It seems more likely to relate it to the devastation of Jerusalem and the land in general, with Duhm, *Jeremia*, 317 ("Diesmal ist dies fröhlichste Fest ein Trauertag, weil der Zorn Gottes auf dem Lande ruht.").

25 See for a similar observation regarding Lamentations Frevel, "Zerbrochene Zier."

26 See also the book of Baruch, which seems to presuppose that after the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem (Bar 1:1–2), the temple is still in function (Bar 1:10, 14; 2:16); see Avioz, "Date of the Destruction," 91.

27 See Ammann, "Second Kings," 14f, with references to further literature.

28 Levin, "Empty Land," 77; see also Würthwein, *Könige*, 478.

29 See Cogan and Tadmor, *2 Kings*, 320.

building account in 1 Kgs 7 (cf. 1 Kgs 7:40*.45.50) and focuses on bronze vessels, since according to 2 Kgs 24:13, vessels of gold have already been taken to Babylonia under Jehojachin.[30] The list in 2 Kgs 25:13–17, thus, corresponds to the narrative logic of the books of Kings: it creates a reference to the temple building account and brings the gradual decline of the treasures of Jerusalem to an end by having the last remaining items removed.[31]

The list in Jer 52 is based on 2 Kgs 25, but it is considerably longer: Jer 52:17–19 MT lists 16 items (compared to 10 in 2 Kgs 25:13–17 and 13 in Jer 52:19–19 AlT), and the description of the pillars in vv. 21–23 is much more detailed.[32] Some of the additional items in Jer 52 could have been borrowed from the account of the making of the temple vessels in 1 Kgs 7 (see 1 Kgs 7:49f. for the כפות, ספות and מנרות added in Jer 52,19).[33] Not all of the additions to the list in Jer 52:17–21 conform to the description in Kings, as they include also vessels which are mentioned nowhere in the book of Kings (such as the מנקיות and the golden and silver סירות) and items which according to the book of Kings already were removed (the twelve bulls in Jer 52:20).[34] The longer list in Jer 52 is thus not just the result of harmonization with other biblical lists of temple vessels, but rather shows a genuine interest in creatively expanding the list of temple vessels.[35]

Again, several insights can be drawn from these variations. First, in contrast to Kings, the plundering of the temple is not presented as a continuous process in Jer 52, where all the temple vessels seem to be taken by the Babylonians.[36] This shift could add to the tendency to represent the Babylonian conquest as a singular disaster – a tendency already observed concerning the date of the temple destruction.

Second, the plundering of the temple becomes an important theme in the representation of the events relating to the Babylonian conquest. While it was probably not yet present in the earliest account in Kings, it becomes a main focus of the narrative in Jer 52, where the description of the plundered temple vessels makes up more than 1/5 of the account of the Babylonian conquest. This interest in the temple vessels continues in the later tradition, although not necessarily in the form of extending their list. For instance, in contrast to the depiction in Kings (2 Kgs 24:13; 25:13), in 2 Chr 36:18, the temple vessels were not broken. Behind this representation of the events stands the idea that the temple vessels were preserved in Babylonia and brought back in Persian times.[37] While historically unlikely, this representation symbolizes that the cult of the second temple stands in close continuity with the cult of the first temple.

As a "continuity theme" (to borrow a phrase coined by Peter Ackroyd),[38] the importance of the temple vessels can probably be explained better within a discourse on the temple in Persian times rather than as a reflection of the historical experience of 587.

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30 See, e.g., Duhm, *Jeremia*, 379 (within a historical reading of the text, but the observation is equally relevant in a perspective of narrative coherence).

31 There are a series of "despoliation notices" throughout the books of Kings (1 Kgs 14:26; 15:18; 2 Kgs 12:19; 14:14; 16:8; 18:15; 24:13), see Brettler, "2 Kings 24,3–14," 547f; Martins, *Treasures*. On these notices as expressing the idea of a gradual decline (but also of the misuse of Jerusalem's wealth as a cause of the final disaster), see Wright, "Deportation," 114–26.

32 In particular, Jer 52 (AlT and MT) adds a description of the cords around the pillars (וחוט שתים־עשרה אמה יסבנו ועביו ארבע אצבעות נבוב, v. 21) and of the pomegranates (ויהיו הרמנים תשעים ושלשה רוחה כל־הרמונים מאה על־השבכה סביב, v. 23). For a discussion of these differences, see de Waard, *Jeremiah 52*, 77–80.

33 See de Waard, *Jeremiah 52*, 73 n. 191.

34 מנקיות is attested only in Ex 25:29; 37:16; Num 4:7 and golden/silver סירות are attested nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible; the twelve bulls (Jer 52:20) had already been removed earlier by king Ahaz according to 2 Kgs 16:17. See de Waard, *Jeremiah 52*, 75.

35 On the expansion of the list of temple vessels in Jer 52, see also Ackroyd, "Temple Vessels," 173; Ackroyd, "Historians," 141–2. For a detailed discussion, see de Waard, *Jeremiah 52*, 70–80.

36 On earlier notices of the plundering of temple items throughout the book of Kings (e.g., 1 Kgs 14:26; 2 Kgs 14:14; 18:15f; 24:13), resulting in a depiction of gradual decline, see Wright, "Deportation," 114–26; Martins, *Treasures*, 293–300. The idea of a gradual removal within 2 Kgs 24–25 can also be seen in the fact that 2 Kgs 25:13–17 focuses mainly on bronze items, since golden vessels were thought to be removed already in 2 Kgs 24:13 (see Wright, "Deportation," 119 n. 36). The list in Jer 52, in contrast, seems to aim at a totality of the vessels. An earlier removal of temple vessels by the Babylonians, related to the deportation of Jehoiachin, is mentioned in Jer 27:19f, but the account in Jer 52 does not establish any continuity to events before Zedekiah.

37 See Kalimi and Purvis, "King Jehoiachin;" Wright, "Deportation," 124. See also Ackroyd, "Temple Vessels," 177–80, who makes a similar point but based on the assumption that Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah belong to the same literary work.

38 See Ackroyd, "Temple Vessels." See also Bänzinger, "Tempelgeräte," 121–3, who reads Ezr 1 against the background of Jer 27 (MT).

6 Conclusion

In sum, the comparison of the accounts in Kgs and Jer has shown that there is a tendency in the representation of the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem to condense the events into a single moment of singular disaster. While such a tendency may be common to processes of memory formation, I think it has a particular importance in the context of a cultural trauma.

With regard to specific claims, we have seen that the destruction of the temple – which seems of utmost importance to the later tradition – is not recorded as a central event in the narratives in Kings and Jeremiah. It is possible to shift the date of this event (as seen in Jer 52) and it is even possible to narrate the fall of Jerusalem without referring to this event (as seen in Jer 39).

In addition, the earlier narrative in Kings did probably not contain any reference to the pillage of the temple vessels. However, this theme becomes increasingly important (as seen in the expansions in Jer 52).

The straightforward association of the fall of Jerusalem with the destruction of the temple, which seems so common nowadays, in this sense, seems to be a later development.

On a more general level regarding cultural trauma, this means that what we see in these biblical narratives is not the psychological imprint of disastrous events but rather the result of a process of representation. The biblical texts can tell us how the Babylonian conquest was remembered, but they do not inform us on how it was experienced. Even elements which may seem central to us, like the devastation and pillage of the temple, are not necessarily recorded in ancient accounts.

The question to continue this line of research would then be: Which carrier groups fostered the claims concerning the devastation and pillage of the temple, and how did this representation of events become dominant? Cultural trauma often becomes virulent at a moment when it serves to justify beliefs and actions in the present. Comparative evidence from Mesopotamia indicates that mourning over a devastated sanctuary often takes place in the context of its restoration.[39] The focus on the temple (rather than, e.g., the royal court) as ancient Judah's central institution betrays the perspective of Judean scribes of the Persian and Hellenistic periods.[40] Thinking along these lines, it could well be possible that the devastation of the temple in biblical accounts has less to do with the historical experience of the Babylonian conquest than with its representation in later times.

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39 On this use of Sumerian *balag*-lamentations in the First Millennium BCE, see Cohen, *Balag-Compositions*, 13–5.

40 Wright, "Deportation," 127 points to the change in Judah's social organization as one of the reasons for the increasing focus on the temple vessels.

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