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# From Annihilation to Dispossession

Transforming Memories of חרם in the Book of Joshua

Jenna Kemp

*«... to remember is thus not simply to turn backward; it is itself a type of action that steadies us in the face of an unknown and unpredictable future» (Browne 2004: 60).*

The research project in Basel of which I am a part is titled «Transforming Memories of Collective Violence in the Hebrew Bible»<sup>1</sup>, and in this article I would like to enter into the inherent link between «transforming» and «memories» as I examine one of the most violent traditions in the Hebrew Bible: the חרם motif in the book of Joshua, a type of war that suggests a complete annihilation of the enemy (Monroe 2007). It appears in several places throughout the book of Joshua: in reference to the destruction of the Amorite kings Sihon and Og (Josh 2:10), which is in Joshua's own literary past (reported in Deut 2:26-3:22); in relation to Ai and Jericho within the narrative arc of the book (Josh 6-8); and against other Amorite kings in the literary present (Josh 10). It appears lastly in the united stand against Joshua initiated by the king of Hazor (Josh 11) and in regard to Joshua's campaign against the giants in the land – the Anakim (Josh 11:21-22).<sup>2</sup> While the Joshua narrative is full of this type of mass annihilation and while the text contains several «endings» that note the completion and unmitigated success of the חרם campaign (Knauf 2007), the book as a whole lies in tension with itself since there are inhabitants of the land still remaining as the book of Joshua comes to a close.

In this article, I will examine how Joshua's farewell speech in chapter 23 – arguably the latest ending, compositionally speaking – recalls discourses of complete annihilation but reinscribes their significance toward a discourse of future, ongoing dispossession, thereby transforming the meaning of the past. I suggest that Joshua's speech reopens the closed and complete past and flips its significance into the future. Theorizing this speech as an act of remembering allows us as readers to examine dynamics of memory, and specifically the interconnected relationship between past, present, and future within these processes.

1 Swiss National Science Foundation project PCEGPI\_181219.

2 Hendel (2022) also identifies the Amorites as being related to the indigenous giant tradition, as evidenced by Amos 2:9-10.

1. *Cultural Memory Theory in Biblical Studies:  
Reorienting Our Presentist Approach*

Biblical scholarship that addresses issues of cultural memory tends to focus on the presence of «cultural memories» in biblical literature.<sup>3</sup> This orientation may be a natural outworking of biblical studies' interest in issues relating to history over the course of its existence. Since biblical studies has challenged the historicity of the events that the Bible depicts, it has been helpful to think of the Bible not as containing history but rather cultural memory (Davies 2008). The limited focus here, however, has narrowed the scope and the play possible with the theoretical approach onto thinking of cultural memory primarily in reference to past events (more on this below). At the same time, regarding theory of cultural memory, there has been a history/memory dichotomy baked in that began with its foundational figure, Maurice Halbwachs (1925; Engl. transl. 1992) and is likewise fundamental to the more recent influential work of Pierre Nora (1984; Engl. transl. 1996).<sup>4</sup> Contemporary theorists of cultural memory, however, have attempted to break this binary and expand into new aspects of remembering, including asking questions about processes and dynamics of memory and the relationship between literature and cultural memory (Assmann 2011; Erll 2011a).

Following these directions in the field of memory studies itself, I focus here on *dynamics* of memory in order to bring analytical attention to the forces that drive cultural products through time. For example, sociologist Jeffrey Olick (2016: 45) states, «we must remember that memory is a process and not a thing, a faculty rather than a place. Collective memory is something ... that we *do*, not something ... that we *have*».<sup>5</sup> In considering the Bible, therefore, I would urge moving beyond saying that the Bible *contains* cultural memories; rather, I would nuance this by arguing that the Bible and the texts, narratives, practices, and ideas reflected in it are cultural products formed by *processes* of cultural memory.

Biblical studies has in large part not yet articulated this nuance.<sup>6</sup> Rather, the dichotomization of history and memory on which we have historically relied fits

3 Hendel 2001; Smith 2004; Davies 2008; Wilson 2018; Ben Zvi 2019.

4 Nora characterizes memory as authentic and unconscious and history as conscious and corrosive to authentic memory (in its attempt to assert a «true» memory). For a critique of Nora broadly, see Sengupta 2009.

5 The terminological difference between «collective» and «cultural» memory need not derail us here.

6 On the forefront toward more complex views are: Pioske 2015; Wilson 2018; Hendel 2022.

in tandem with a presentist view of cultural memory, which prioritizes thinking about how the pressures of the present shape images of the past for the benefit of those with (political) power (Hobsbawm/Ranger 1983). Scholars holding this view, in the words of Olick,

see memory as highly variable, ask how contemporary interests shape which images of the past are deployed in contemporary contexts, and often seek to use professional history to unmask such efforts at manipulation and misuse. (Olick 2016: 45)

What Olick is pointing to is the orientation toward thinking about political control of the past that often characterizes a presentist approach to cultural memory. Barry Schwartz also comments on this perspective, tracing its emergence back to Nora, whose

sharp distinction between history and collective memory, like Halbwachs's before him, has seduced readers into asserting unwittingly, and often despite themselves, that what is not historical must be «invented» or «constructed» – a position transforming the study of collective memory into a kind of cynical muckraking. (Schwartz 2000: 11)

Whether or not political questions are the motivation, what the presentist view is lacking is a nuanced consideration of how the paths by which mnemonic products travel and the dynamics between change and continuity therein create a range of potentials for meaning for that product in any given present. It is not solely in the power of agents in each present to determine what forms the past takes. Olick (2016: 438) attempts to ameliorate this imbalance and describes remembering as «a mechanism for mediating between the weight of the past ... and forces in the present» by which «we are continually locating our presents at the ever-shifting intersection of past and future». The presentist view emphasizes the power of the «forces in the present» but often does not consider in an adequate way the relationship of those forces with «the weight of the past», nor the limits that this weight places on the potentials for what directions and forms cultural products can take.

It would be reductive to say that biblical scholarship on cultural memory engages in the «cynical muckraking» articulated by Schwartz, since scholars rather seek to use the concept of cultural memory in order to understand the Bible as a cultural product (Hendel 2022; Weitzman 2016). However, the orientation toward «unmasking» political actors' «manipulation and misuse» of the past in a presentist mode (as articulated by Olick above) certainly has a powerful presence in the field, as is illustrated in the work of Philip Davies. In his book *Memories*



of *Ancient Israel*, Davies reveals his presentist perspective when he draws a comparison between Israel's scribal establishment and «Orwell's famous Ministry of Truth» and characterizes the scribes as those through whom the texts were «fed and absorbed into the public memory» (2008: 113). This orientation obfuscates any *dynamics* of memory and the *agency* of multiple actors operating from different locations and time periods within cultural systems, and it instead reduces a diachronic cultural process onto synchronic political power structures.<sup>7</sup>

Another major figure in the study of cultural memory in the Hebrew Bible is Ehud Ben Zvi, whose presentist view is perhaps better characterized as «ask[ing] how contemporary interests shape which images of the past are deployed in contemporary contexts» (Olick 2016: 45). Ben Zvi's main goal (and the goal of scholars with whom he often writes) is to move past the question of whether or not the texts reflect historical figures and events and instead to read texts in order to understand how their authors *thought* about their past and therefore how they built their identities in the present.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to my approach, Ben Zvi is significantly less interested in how memory travels over time. We could add insight to this work being done in the field by reorienting our research toward the dialogic relationship between synchronic and diachronic forces, to which I now turn.

Scholars in the field of memory studies – from cognitive to sociological – agree that the existence of memory over time depends on the act of remembering, which actually changes memory in one way or another (for example, Mehl-Madrona/Mainguy 2022). Memory, therefore, in part finds the continuity of its existence in transformation. Without change, memories fade and eventually die. The attempt to preserve memory (remembering), perhaps somewhat ironically, is the very act which transforms it. The poet Yehuda Amichai (2000: 171) captures this dynamic beautifully in the seventh poem from his collection titled «And Who Will Remember the Rememberers?»:

And who will remember? And what do you use to preserve memory?  
How do you preserve anything in this world?  
You preserve it with salt and with sugar, high heat and deep-freeze,

7 Of particular relevance for nuancing this point could be, for example, de Certeau's theorization of the «tactics» of the everyday practices of those with less political power against the «strategies» of those with more (de Certeau 2011: xvii–xxiv).

8 Ben Zvi seeks access to what he calls the «social mindscape» of the literati in late Persian/early Hellenistic Yehud. See his recent collection of essays in Ben Zvi 2019; see also Wilson 2018.

vacuum sealers, dehydrators, mummifiers.

But the best way to preserve memory is to conserve it inside forgetting  
so not even a single act of remembering will seep in  
and disturb memory's eternal rest.

In a tongue-in-cheek way, Amichai expresses that memory only remains stable, untouched, and unchanged when it is forgotten – otherwise it must be transformed (metaphorically via dehydrators, mummifiers, etc.). Memory cannot be «preserved»; it can only be remembered. As Astrid Erll (2011b: 13) states, memories «do not exist outside individual minds, which have to actualize and reactualize those contents continually to keep them alive», and each actualization, in turn, changes the memory. Thus, memory is not a stable entity, but is necessarily transformed through the use that maintains its existence. When it is not transformed, it finds its «eternal rest» – to return to Amichai – in forgetting.

For this reason, in my approach I generally prefer to talk about *processes* of memory and *acts* of remembering rather than referring to something *as a memory*. This perspective is in line with Olick (2016: 463), who states that memory should be «understood on its own terms as discourse, rather than only as product or indicator». To be explicit, when I speak of memory, I am talking about a field of discourse that unfolds over time; I am not referring to something that *is* or *is not* «a» cultural memory. I think this brings a bit of clarity to the field of biblical studies, and it asks us to move past using the term «cultural memory» descriptively (to label the contents of the Bible as memories) and to think more deeply about what we mean when we call iterations of the past «memories». «Memories» only exist as such when they find expression.<sup>9</sup>

In this article, I focus on the «dynamics of memory», by which I mean that I prioritize thinking about the act of remembering, what that act does to create (new, potentially even transgressive) meaning, and how cultural products survive the natural inclination toward forgetting.<sup>10</sup> Remembering is not the recall

9 The issue of storage is also crucial in the continuous existence of memory; see Assmann 2011: 327–394.

10 Scholars throughout the field of memory studies situate forgetting as primary to remembering. For example, Ann Rigney (2005: 17) states that the term «*anamnesis*» may be even better than either remembrance or «memory», since it emphasizes the fact that recollection involves overcoming oblivion (an-*amnesia*), and that forgetting precedes remembering rather than vice versa». On forgetting, see further Forty/Küchler 2001; Weinrich 2004; Augé 2004; Connerton 2008; Stoellger 2015; Gudmundsdottir 2017; Liebermann 2023.

of the past, *per se*. It is the *reconstruction* of the past in the present.<sup>11</sup> These reconstructions, however, shift over time. A person remembering a cultural product first has to receive some iteration of it. And over time each act of remembering transforms the possibilities for future meaning as that product is handed down through changing social frames and through various new present moments, with each iteration transforming the product's meanings and connections to other cultural products and frames. This theory of cultural memory attunes us to the interplay of continuity and discontinuity in these processes. Remembering is a way of receiving, transforming, and passing on cultural products emerging from the past, products that are not limited to the past as *event* (which we tend to call «memories»), but can encompass various aspects of cultural production (ritual, literature, myth, law, etc.). The survival of all of these cultural products from one moment to the next relies on processes of cultural memory – processes in which change and transformation play a central role (Kemp 2023).

With this larger conversation in mind, I would like to turn to Joshua's speech in Josh 23 to explore some of these dynamics by looking at the relationship that the character of Joshua draws between the past, present, and future. First, I will briefly overview some of the compositional issues at stake in studying Josh 23. I will largely sidestep the implications of this chapter for large-scale compositional models (which are far more complex than this article can adequately address), but will instead focus on Josh 23 as a late (perhaps the latest) insertion into the book and as a literary unit (rather than making arguments for an internal composition history). Second, I will dedicate the largest part of the study to addressing the content of the speech from three interrelated angles in order to understand how Joshua draws the past, present, and future into relation with one another. These are: a) the temporality reflected in the narrative speech event; b) the way in which Joshua reopens the total annihilation (חֶרֶם) of the Amorites that earlier parts of the book of Joshua had marked as complete; and c) the relationship that Joshua creates between the past and the future. While the speech contains references to the past, Joshua's focus is largely on the future, and he points his rhetoric toward future continual observance of Torah so that Israel will not mix with but will

11 The idea that remembering is not about preservation but about reconstruction has been a foundational insight to theory of cultural memory and was first articulated by its founding figure, Maurice Halbwachs (1950; Engl. transl. 1980: 75), who resisted the Bergsonian construction of individual memory as images stored in one's subconscious. See the discussion in Coser 1992: 7–13.

rather drive out (יָרַשׁ, *Hipbil*) the nations remaining in the land. Third, I will consider what narrative futures Joshua creates in this speech and how they relate to his vision of the past. Here I will explore the relationship between precarity and resolution, between stability and instability, in Joshua's act of remembering. Lastly, in my conclusion, I will situate my findings within a presentist view of cultural memory common in biblical studies, after which I will point toward what questions we might ask when we consider the dynamics of memory and the complex integration of temporalities within acts of remembering. I hope to plumb some of these issues more deeply in future studies, but in this article, I will simply pose the questions.

In Josh 23, Joshua gives a speech to the assembled Israelite leaders in which he reminds them what has happened in their past and commands them concerning what to do in the future. In his speech, the past to which he refers is rather vague, but he points to a future with much clearer detail:

1 And it happened many days after Yahweh had given rest to Israel from all of their surrounding enemies, when Joshua was old, advanced in years, 2 that Joshua called to all of Israel – to its elders and to its heads and to its judges and to its officials – and he said, «I am old, advanced in years. 3 But you, you have seen all that Yahweh your God has done to all of these nations before you, for Yahweh your God, he is the one who fights [was fighting] for you.<sup>12</sup> 4 See, I have caused these remaining nations in the inheritance of your tribes to fall. From the Jordan (all the nations I have cut down) and the great sea where the sun goes down.<sup>13</sup> 5 Now Yahweh, he will drive them out from before you, and he will dispossess them from before you, and you will possess their land, just as Yahweh your God has spoken to you.<sup>14</sup>

6 And you shall be very strong to guard and to do everything written in the Torah of Moses, so as not to turn from it to the right or to the left, 7 so as not to come into these nations – these ones remaining with you – and by the name of their gods you shall not call, and you shall not swear, and you shall not worship them, and you shall not bow to them. 8 But rather, to Yahweh your God you shall cling, just as you have done until this very day.

9 And Yahweh dispossessed from before you big and strong nations. And as for you, no one has withstood you until this very day. 10 One of you will pursue a thousand, for Yahweh your God he is the one who fights for you, just as he has spoken to you. 11 And you shall very carefully guard yourselves for your own sake, to love Yahweh your God.

12 The verb נָלַחַם is a ms participle, which does not reflect tense. I choose to represent both options for meaning because the Hebrew captures both («fights» and «was fighting»).

13 On v. 4, see n. 27.

14 See n. 42 for text-critical analysis.

12 But if you actually turn and you cling to the remnant of these nations – these ones remaining with you – and you intermarry with them, and you go into them and they into you, 13 then you must know with certainty that Yahweh your God will no longer dispossess these nations from before you,<sup>15</sup> and they will become a trap for you and a snare and a scourge in your side and a thorn in your eye until you have perished from this good earth which Yahweh has given to you.

14 Now see, today I am going the way of all the earth. And you shall know with all of your heart and with your whole self that not one word has fallen from all of the good words which Yahweh your God spoke unto you. The whole thing has come to you; not one word has fallen from it. 15 And it will be that just as every good word has come to you that Yahweh your God has said to you, thus Yahweh will bring upon you every evil word until he destroys you from this good earth which Yahweh has given to you<sup>16</sup> 16a when you transgress the covenant of Yahweh your God which he commanded you, and you go and you worship other gods and you bow to them». <sup>17</sup>

On the narrative level of this speech and as a representation of dynamics of memory in literature,<sup>18</sup> Joshua publicly recalls the past in a non-explicit way when he begins by reminding the Israelites that they saw «what Yahweh has done to all of these nations before you, for Yahweh your God, he is the one who fights [was fighting] for you» (v. 3). What his wording suggests, however, is that he is calling to mind the complete annihilation of the Amorites in the narrative past (drawing on what I call the Amorite-חֲרָם thread; on this, see §3.2 below). While his

15 LXX does not reflect אֱלֹהֵיכֶם. This difference occurs throughout the chapter, and the shorter reading in each case should be preferred. In general, the LXX in chapter 23 has more words and phrases missing relative to the text in MT. De Troyer (2018: 168) suggests that «the Masoretic Text *grosso modo* is a further development of the Hebrew text underlying the Vorlage of the Old Greek text of the book of Joshua».

16 Josh 23:14 flows into v. 15 in framing «every good thing [word]» (v. 15) as a part of the statement, «not one word has fallen from all of the good words which Yahweh your God has spoken to you» (v. 14). LXX does not reflect אֱלֹהֵיכֶם in v. 15a or בָּ (as MT does), but it does reflect it where MT does not have it; see n. 15.

17 All translations are my own. The LXX text ends where the *atnach* is in MT; i.e., after v. 16a. It is difficult to discern here what is to be preferred. Verse 16b could have been lost in LXX due to haplography. At the same time, v. 16a could reasonably be read as the protasis to either v. 15b or v. 16b. LXX is certainly the shorter text, and the generally earlier text (see n. 15). Thus, I tentatively follow LXX.

18 Erll/Nünning 2006. That is, how the speech mediates the reader's experience of the narrative, adjusting the potentials for the meaning a reader would make as they progress from earlier to later moments in the narrative. I use the term «reader» quite broadly and with the knowledge that it is somewhat anachronistic. However, it serves as a heuristic label for the receiver of the text tradition (whether reader, listener, or scribe). For a focus on how readers make meaning, see Hrushovski 1982.

construction of the past is somewhat vague, his larger focus is on the future and the ongoing project of dispossessing the «remaining nations». On a compositional level, the authoring scribe of Josh 23, therefore, consolidates the reader's memory of the narrative past and projects its significance toward the Israelites' eventual future failure to heed Joshua's warnings, resulting in the exile of Judah from its land. On both the narrative and compositional levels, Joshua's speech reopens the previously-noted completeness of *annihilation* in the past and projects it into a narrative future characterized by ongoing *dispossession* (a future that is in the future relative to Joshua, but a future that is in the past relative to the author).<sup>19</sup> This process of opening up the past, reinscribing its meaning in the present, and projecting it toward the (narrative) future is a central feature of remembering, and it is these acts which make up processes of cultural memory – processes which rely on transformation.

## 2. *Joshua 23 and Composition History*

In the words of Trent Butler (2014: 268), Josh 23 reflects «the literary tradition of the farewell (death-bed) speech or sermon placed at the end of a literary structure to summarize the literary section and form a bridge to the next major section of the literary piece». There are disagreements about the specifics of how Josh 23 fits into the composition history of the book of Joshua, the composition history of the chapter itself, its relationship to the second farewell speech of Joshua in Josh 24, its relationship to the Deuteronomistic History (DtrH) and Deuteronomic ideology, and how these issues extend into questions relating to the composition of the Penta- or Hexateuch and what scope of literary work we are even dealing with. Most of these questions lie outside the scope of this paper, though a few brief notes are warranted.<sup>20</sup>

Scholars have largely framed redactional and compositional arguments within Josh 23 around the question of the complete annihilation of the Canaanites. Thomas Römer (2007: 117), for example, sees the connections between Josh 23

19 Rachel Havrelock (2020: 91) makes a similar observation that between the first and second halves of Joshua, there is a shift in focus from conquest to settlement. She states that «[the editors] expertly distinguish between a great war that unequivocally establishes national sovereignty and the contingent nature of settlement».

20 For a current review and history of Hexateuch scholarship in relation to DtrH (with attention to the book of Joshua), see Germany 2018.



and Josh 1 and concludes that «since the introductory speech, as well as other texts in Joshua, insists on a total conquest, one may conclude that the primitive form of the farewell speech in Josh 23 reflected the same ideology, and that the text was reworked later in order to modify this ideology».<sup>21</sup> It is common for scholars to make redactional and compositional arguments within chapter 23 based on which layers of the text might reflect a complete or an incomplete annihilation of the Canaanites. Some understand Josh 23 to be a part of the periodic speeches that frame the Deuteronomistic collection.<sup>22</sup> Others see the influence of non-dtr threads, such as Priestly or post-Priestly traditions, especially in recognizing the connections between Josh 23 and Josh 1. There is some consensus that chapter 23 post-dates Joshua's speech in chapter 24, but this too is up for debate.<sup>23</sup> Recent studies have also highlighted the role that Josh 23-24 plays in the literary transition between Joshua and Judges.<sup>24</sup>

Joshua 23 sits at the nexus of enormously significant compositional issues relating to the DtrH, Pentateuch, Hexateuch, and the book of Joshua itself. These are too extensive and complex to treat within the scope of the present study, so I will focus instead on the aspects on which there is broad agreement. First, there is agreement that Josh 23 is a relatively late insertion into an earlier form of the book of Joshua and secondly that this chapter reflects dtr language in a number of ways (whatever we might think about the broad construction of DtrH).<sup>25</sup> Whether Josh 23 reflects a single scribal hand or multiple hands, at some point, someone thought it appropriate to link the end of the book of Joshua with the concepts of Torah observance and the warning against assimilation with the «remaining

21 Likewise, Latvus (1998: 28–34) sees the core of this chapter (which he identifies as vv. 1–5, 9b–10, 14) as dependent on the complete annihilation noted in 21:42–45.

22 Butler 2014: 268; Rösel 2007: 184–189. For recent discussions of DtrH, see Römer 2007; Hutton 2009.

23 Dozeman 2010: 109ff; Butler 2014: 269ff. For example, Rösel (2007: 188) suggests that the ending in Josh 23 has been written to replace that of Josh 24. Knauf (2007: 221ff) also considers Josh 24 to have literary priority over Josh 23. In contrast, Nelson (1981: 94–98) sees Josh 24 as the later addition.

24 Mäkipelto 2018: 230–235; Berner/Samuel 2018.

25 Butler 2014: 268–271. In saying that Josh 23 reflects dtr language, I am not advocating any particular large-scale theory of formation of the Penta-/Hexateuch or the Former Prophets. I am recognizing that there is a language and ideology in Josh 23 that reflects that found in Deuteronomy. See Römer 2007: 117f.



nations.»<sup>26</sup> There is one verse (v. 4), however, that I excise from my discussion due to my perception of it as a relatively late scribal gloss, different in character and content from the rest of the chapter.<sup>27</sup> With some of these compositional issues set aside, what I want to pay attention to is how the author of Josh 23 recalls for the reader what has happened in the narrative past in the book of Joshua (most of which would have been inherited by the scribe[s] authoring this passage), and in particular how the speech deals with the issue of the Canaanites' continued presence in relation to the dynamics between past, present, and future. This finding will help us to better understand how remembering transforms memory, and the paths by which cultural products persist over time.

### 3. *Joshua's Speech*

#### 3.1. *Temporality Reflected in the Narrative Speech Event*

As a farewell speech, Josh 23 sits at the nexus of past and future, in liminal time introduced by the narrator in v. 1, who grounds the moment of speech with the phrase, «after Yahweh had given rest to Israel from all of their surrounding enemies». Verse 1 does not connote total victory, but a time between times. The same phrase appears in several other places canonically, always indicating a liminal

26 The language of «remaining nations» (גוֹיִם נִשְׁאָרִים), or some similar variation) is found in Josh 23:4, 7, 12 (see further the references to «nations» in 3, 4, 9, 13). Elsewhere in Joshua, «nation» (גוֹי) refers to the nation of Israel (3:17; 4:1; 5:6, 8; 10:13), which further suggests the alterity of chapter 23 from the rest of the book (and links it with other passages in the conquest traditions that warn against assimilation to local practices, such as Exod 23:20-33; Exod 34:11-16; Deut 7:1-5; etc. Joshua 1 (which otherwise reflects links with Josh 23) does not even mention adversaries at all. At the same time, each instance of the phrase «these remaining nations» has text-critical issues, which suggests that they could be secondary glosses (cf. Nelson 1997: 258ff; Becker 2006: 150f; Butler 2014, 266f).

27 I suggest that v. 4 is the result of an attempt to clarify and resolve ambiguities in v. 3 that creates blatant contradictions in the chapter as it stands. In v. 3, Joshua makes the vague claim that the Israelites have «seen» what Yahweh did to the nations. V. 4 clarifies what they have seen. It calls them to «see!» and provides more specificity of the past they have seen; namely, that «I have caused these remaining nations ... to fall.» This statement creates a contradiction in that the «remaining nations» that Joshua says Israel should dispossess in the future elsewhere in the chapter are described as having been destroyed in the past. It is also conflicted on which nations these are or how to describe them («these remaining nations» in v. 4a versus «all the nations I have cut down» in v. 4b, which itself interrupts an otherwise grammatical clause, rendering it as somewhat textually scrambled; see Butler 2014, 266f). Thus, v. 4 seems to gain its existence from responding to and attempting to resolve some of the ambiguities and tensions in the larger speech.

moment: a transition from warfare that establishes stability to a different possibility in the future.<sup>28</sup> The only place in which this phrase occurs as a resolution is in Josh 21:44,<sup>29</sup> which was one of the book's previous «endings», describing the land occupation as otherwise complete (Josh 21:43-45).<sup>30</sup> Joshua's speech in chapter 23, however, reopens the completion marked in that ending and reintroduces the problem of remaining enemies. Israel is thus positioned in a moment between having annihilated all enemies in the past, and the projection toward having to confront them once again in the future.<sup>31</sup>

The temporality reflected in the speech also works to ground the reader between the past and future, inviting them to sit in the narrative present that the character of Joshua experiences, and blending Joshua's present with their own. This time structure is established in part by deuteronomistic phrases such as «until this very day» (עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה) in vv. 8-9. This type of deictic phraseology creates, in the words of Ron Hendel (2010: 35), the «rhetoric of memory», which «makes the reader a witness to the revelation, reviving the past with the pragmatic effects of «presentative» language». Robert Alter (2018b: 610) discusses these characteristic «pointing words» throughout Deuteronomy proper, and states that part of their role is «to create through a written text the memory of a foundational national event, so that the latter-day Israelites listening ... will feel that they themselves are recreating that event». With this language, the speech links the past to the present of the readers who are drawn into the experience of the speech itself.

In addition, in its genre as a speech, it represents a duration within the world of the narrative that precisely matches the real-time duration of the reader's experience.<sup>32</sup> A speech requires a first-person voice, which, in the words of Erll and

28 After Yahweh gives Israel rest from the surrounding enemies, the Israelites are to centralize worship (Deut 12:8-12) and defeat Amalek (Deut 25:19), and after Yahweh gives David rest from his enemies, David tries to initiate the building of the temple. Having rest from one's enemies initiates a liminal period opening up the possibility of going in a new direction.

29 Perhaps with the inclusion of this very phrase, however, Josh 21:43-45 is actually another instance in Joshua in which there is some ambivalence between the battle narrativized as חָרַם and the apparent incompleteness of the חָרַם.

30 According to Zev Farber, «[t]he language of the speech [in Josh 23] is so similar to the ending of chapter 21 that it is certain that either one copied the other or they were written by the same hand» (Farber 2016: 70 n. 132; with reference to Römer 2010).

31 The inherent precarity of the situation is reflected in the ambivalence represented in the speech, as noted by Alter 2018a: 69: «in this passage, the conquest of the Canaanite peoples alternates between being a completed process, as here [v. 1] or a future activity, as in verse 5».

32 For «duration» within narrative discourses, see Nelson/Spence 2020: 7f.

Nünning (2006: 22), «already rests on a (largely implicit) concept of memory, namely on the concept of a difference between pre-narrative experience on the one hand, and on the other hand a memory which forms the past through narrative and retrospectively creates meaning». Erll and Nünning generalize the role of memory and anticipation as mostly implicit in speech, but here in Josh 23, these concepts lie directly on the surface, which links the reader's present with Joshua's own as he sums up what has happened and links it causatively to what therefore *will happen* in the narrative future. This act invites the reader to remember the narrative past, to interpret it in light of the contents of the speech, and to anticipate the future in terms of Joshua's articulation of it, perhaps even examining their recent past and present for the contents of his prediction. Yet in this act of remembering, Joshua transforms the narrative past by referencing and redefining the complete annihilation (חרם) of the Amorites toward a continuous dispossession (שׁר; *Hiphil*) of the nations remaining, which I will elaborate upon below. The past annihilation had been narrated as a complete and closed event in Josh 10:40-42; 11:16-23; and 21:43-45, which are all compositionally older endings (Knauf 2007). But Joshua's speech revisits that closure, marks it as incomplete, and reorients its significance into a future dispossession.

### 3.2. *Reopening a Complete Annihilation*

Joshua's speech begins with what I am calling a reference to an «enclosed» past (an articulation of the past that is not linked to the future, in contrast to the bound relationship between past and future that I will discuss below), one of only two such references in the speech:

But you, you have seen all that Yahweh your God has done to all of these nations before you, for Yahweh your God, he is the one who fights [was fighting] for you (23:3).<sup>33</sup>

Here, Joshua refers to the past in rather vague language. «All that Yahweh has done to all of these nations before you» does not specify a precise event. However, the theme of sight («you have seen») and the phrases «all that Yahweh your God has done» and «Yahweh your God, he is the one who fights for you» call on the Israelites and reader alike to remember a narrative that I call the Amorite-חרם thread. This thread appears in Deuteronomy and Joshua and relates to narrative

33 In addition, Josh 23:4 belongs to this category of referencing «an enclosed event», but as I articulated above, I leave it out of consideration (see n. 27).

elements from the escape from Egypt, the defeat of the Amorite kings Sihon and Og (Num 21), and through Joshua's defeat of the Amorite kings in Josh 10-11. Joshua activates the Amorite-חרם thread, but he unsettles its completion and re-orientes it toward future dispossession (יִרְשׁ, *Hiphil*). I will develop this point further here before moving on to other kinds of references to the future in the speech and to a deeper discussion of how Joshua imagines dispossession.

The Amorite-חרם thread begins in Deut 1, in which Moses recounts the story of the spies and the Israelites' refusal to enter the land because of their fear of the Amorites.<sup>34</sup> Moses recounts his attempt to convince the Israelites to go take the land, telling them:

יהוה אלהיכם ההלך לפניכם הוא ילחם ככל אשר עשה אתכם במצרים לעיניכם	Deut 1:30	Yahweh your God, the one going before you, he himself will fight for you, according to all he has done with you in Egypt before your eyes.
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In this verse, Moses tells the Israelites almost verbatim what Joshua tells them in Josh 23 (with some rearrangement of phrases):

ואתה ראיתם את כל אשר עשה יהוה אלהיכם לכל הגוים האלה מפניכם כי יהוה אלהיכם הוא הנלחם לכם	Josh 23:3	But you, you have seen all that Yahweh your God has done to all of these nations before you, for Yahweh your God, he is the one who fights [was fighting] for you.
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In Deut 1:30, Moses reminds the Israelites that they had seen everything that Yahweh had done up to that point in their journey, and that they should therefore have known that Yahweh would have fought for them. This rhetoric admonishes the Israelites for not allowing their memory of the past to have structured their future expectations: according to everything Yahweh did *to Egypt*, Yahweh would have done such against the *Amorites* should the Israelites have listened to Moses. Moses further notes that these acts against Egypt happened in their sight – before their eyes – just as Joshua tells the Israelites, «You have seen ... » Moses

34 This is in some contrast to the non-P version in Num 13:29, which indicates that the land is full of Amalekites, Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, and Canaanites, with Nephilim added in v. 33. This list is shorter in Num 14:25, 39-45, (also non-P) which only names the first and last nations from 13:29, the Amalekites and Canaanites (vv. 25, 43, 45), suggesting perhaps that the list in Num 13:29 was expanded according to Deuteronomic lists of nations (e.g., Deut 7:1).

therefore remembers the past by citing the work of Yahweh against Egypt and positioning it so that it informs what Yahweh would have done against the Amorites had the Israelites been obedient.<sup>35</sup> All of this is placed into the rhetoric of memory in that Moses recalls the moment in which the Israelites unsuccessfully navigated the nexus between their memory of the past and their resulting future actions.

Moses takes this language up again in Deut 3:21-22 with the actual defeat of the Amorite kings, Sihon and Og, and this time Moses remembers their defeat and makes it meaningful in light of the charge to Joshua to take the land in the future:

ואת יהושע צויתי בעת ההוא<sup>36</sup> לאמר  
עיניך הראת את כל אשר עשה יהוה  
אלהיכם לשני המלכים האלה כן  
יעשה יהוה לכל הממלכות אשר  
אתה עבר שמה לא תיראום כי יהוה  
אלהיכם הוא הנלחם לכם

Deut  
3:21-22

But I commanded Joshua at that time saying, «Your eyes have seen all that Yahweh your God has done to these two kings. Thus Yahweh will do to all of the kingdoms into which you are crossing. Do not be afraid, for Yahweh your God, he is the one who fights for you.»

Again, Moses uses the language of sight as memory – Joshua has «seen» everything Yahweh has done, this time in reference to the **חַרֵּם** against the Amorite kings, which Moses describes as **חַרֵּם** wars (Deut 2:34 and repeated almost verbatim in 3:6: «... and we annihilated [**וַנַּחֲרֵם**] every city, men, women, and children»). Moses notes that in the future, Joshua should understand that this is what Yahweh *will do* since Yahweh is the God who fights for Israel. Even further, Moses remembers the defeat of Sihon and Og in the language of the defeat of the Egyptians. In Deut 2:26-29, Moses recounts asking Sihon, the Amorite king, if the Israelites could pass through, as they did in Edom and Moab. Sihon, however, refuses because «Yahweh ... had hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate» (2:30),

35 The linkage of the escape from Egypt under the leadership of Moses with the **חַרֵּם** of the Amorites under Joshua helps to fashion the figure of Joshua in the image of Moses. Farber (2016: 70f) makes an observation of the link between the characters in this chapter, suggesting that Josh 23 «functions as a further example of Joshua playing Moses' role», though he does not draw his conclusion from the argument I make here, but from the general command not to mix with the inhabitants of the land.

36 The MT reads **הָהוּא** (ms in consonantal representation but pointed as a fs since **עַתָּה** is typically feminine). On the consonantal representation of **הוּא** for **הוּא** in the Pentateuch, see Rendsburg 1982: 351ff.

echoing back to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart in Exodus.<sup>37</sup> Thus, Moses again remembers what Yahweh did to the Amorite kings as an extension of what he did in Egypt, and he adds the additional link of what Joshua *will do* with the kingdoms of the land.<sup>38</sup> If we trace the language that Joshua uses in Josh 23:3 through Moses' preamble to Deuteronomy, we observe that Moses has constructed a history that draws a direct line from Egypt through Og and Sihon, directly to Joshua's campaign.

This language also appears in the book of Joshua in connection to the Amorites. The Gibeonites, for example, declare that they have not «seen» but they «have heard ... all that [Yahweh your God] did in Egypt and all that he did to the two Amorite kings» (Josh 9:9-10).<sup>39</sup> Again, this statement links the remembering of what happened in Egypt with the destruction of Sihon and Og, and it projects this fear toward Joshua's actions in that narrative present.<sup>40</sup> The next story in Josh 10 recounts Joshua's own destruction of five Amorite kings. In the midst of this fight, Yahweh joins from heaven (10:11), after which the narrator states, «there has never been a day like that day ... when Yahweh heeded a human voice, *for Yahweh fought for Israel*» (10:14). The chapter continues as Joshua commits חרם against most of these kings' peoples, and the pericope ends in 10:40-42 with no survivor remaining because Joshua «annihilated [החרים] all breath» (v. 40), noting that «Yahweh God of Israel fought for Israel» (v. 42). There is a link, therefore, persisting from the preamble to Deuteronomy through the book of Joshua, between remembering «everything that Yahweh has done», identifying Yahweh as the God who fights for Israel, and the complete annihilation (חרם) of the Amorites.<sup>41</sup>

37 Exod 7:3, 13, 14, 22; 8:11, 15, 28; etc.

38 One last time in Deut 29:1-7 (Hebrew verse numbering), Moses recounts the past and links what Yahweh has done in Egypt with what Yahweh has done with the Amorite kings (Sihon and Og), saying «*You have seen everything that Yahweh has done in front of your eyes in the land of Egypt*» (v. 1); after a brief reference to the wilderness years, he ends with the defeat of Sihon and Og (vv. 6-7) before moving to commands for the present.

39 Interestingly enough, 2 Sam 21:2 notes that the Gibeonites are «not from among the children of Israel, but instead from the remnants of the Amorites», thus exposing some ambivalence with how the Gibeonites are viewed and with their potential connection to the Amorites.

40 In Josh 2:9-14, Rahab recounts a similar story of how Yahweh brought Israel out of Egypt, after which she immediately references their חרם destruction of Sihon and Og.

41 At the closing of Josh 10, the חרם campaign has included peoples who are not Amorites. At the same time, the focus has remained on the Amorite kings and their peoples (the peoples of Eglon, Hebron, and Debir – Amorites – are all explicitly noted as having been annihilated



In his speech in Josh 23, Joshua calls on the first two elements when he says, «you have seen all that Yahweh your God has done to all of these nations before you, for Yahweh your God, he is the one who fights [was fighting] for you». Joshua tugs on a thread that is part of a portrait of complete annihilation (חרם), what I call the Amorite-חרם thread. However, while Joshua recalls it, he omits the key terms (Amorite and חרם), leaving the past somewhat open for new definition. The concept of חרם connotes total annihilation – in the words of Moses, it encompasses the destruction of «men, women, and children» (Deut 2:34; 3:6). Thus, when Joshua reminds the Israelites in Josh 23 that they have «seen all that Yahweh your God has done», he activates what has been described up to that point as a totally resolved or closed past; the Amorites have been completely annihilated. And yet, he does not treat it as complete, but instead projects its significance into the future.

After telling Israel that they have seen what Yahweh did in the past (v. 3), Joshua continues in v. 5 to describe his vision of the future: «Now Yahweh, he will drive them out from before you, and he will dispossess [והוריש] them from before you, and you will possess [וירשתם] their land.»<sup>42</sup> This connection suggests that whatever they saw Yahweh do in the past, there are nations remaining in the present, in effect unsettling the closure reflected in a successful חרם event and providing an opportunity to overwrite how חרם can be remembered in the future. Interestingly, Joshua does not command the completion of חרם in the future, but commands action in terms of ירש (Hiphil and Pa'al): dispossession and possession. In fact, in v. 9 with his second reference to what I have called an «enclosed» past, Joshua marks the openness of the past by redefining it as dispossession, stating, «And Yahweh dispossessed [ויורש] from before you big and strong nations», continuing in v. 10 into the future: «One of you will pursue a thousand, *for Yahweh your God he is the one who fights for you*». Here he describes

by חרם; that is, 10:35, 37, and 39, respectively), such that the link between Egypt, Sihon and Og, and the Amorites Joshua encounters remains.

42 Verse 5 contains a different and longer reading in the LXX, which reads (and I quote Butler's translation), «But the Lord (y)our God will push them out from before us (you), until that they should perish. He will send against them the wild beasts until they utterly destroy them and their kings from before you. You will possess their land, just as the Lord, our God, said to you». Butler (2014: 267) discusses the text-critical possibilities but finds no compelling solution. He ultimately states that «[t]he tradition has interpreted the passage to the extent that the original reading cannot be recovered». The issue need not be resolved here; the language of possession is still present in both LXX and MT.



the future with a direct repetition from his description of the past in v. 3, which is part of the Amorite-**חרם** thread. Using this thread, Joshua states that just as Yahweh *dispossessed* in the *past* as the God who fights for Israel, he will *dispossess* in the *future* as the God who fights for Israel. This slight shift, I suggest, represents a transformation of the organization and meaning of the past from annihilation to dispossession, and it projects the defeat of the «remaining nations» – their dispossession – into the future.

### 3.3. *The Bound Relationship between Past and Future*

In fact, much of Joshua's speech works to assimilate the past to the future and to bind the two together. His use of the past is rather vague and, outside of the enclosed past in vv. 3 and 9, most references to it are in relative clauses nested in references to the future (x will happen in the future [shown in *italics*] just as x/y has happened in the past [shown in **bold**]). Broadly speaking, Joshua draws a bound relationship between past and future in which what happened or was promised in the past will be fulfilled or will continue to occur in the future:

- 23:5     *You will possess the land*, just as **Yahweh your God has spoken to you**.  
 23:8     *But rather to Yahweh your God you shall cling*, just as **you have done** until this very day.  
 23:10    *One of you will pursue a thousand*, for **Yahweh your God he is the one who fights for you**, just as **he has spoken to you**.  
 23:13    *And they will become a trap for you ... until you have perished from this good earth* which **Yahweh has given to you**.  
 23:15    And it will be just as every good word has come to you that **Yahweh your God has said to you**, thus *Yahweh will bring upon you every evil word* until *he destroys you* from this good earth which **Yahweh has given to you**.  
 23:16    *When you transgress the covenant* of **Yahweh your God which he commanded you ...**<sup>43</sup>

43 While I tentatively accepted the shorter LXX reading, if we include v. 16b from MT, there is another statement that binds the past and the future together: «the *anger of Yahweh will burn against you*, and *you will perish* quickly from this good land which **he has given to you**».

We can see, overwhelmingly, that these references to the past are oriented toward land and covenant, but the past to which Joshua refers is not specific. He does not say what God commanded, nor does he remind the people of the contextual events in which these past elements occurred; rather, he relies on the memory of the people to fill in the gaps. Whether or not the Israelites or the reader remember the events, Joshua's *rhetoric* is calling on the power of the past and the concepts of land and covenant in order to make specific calls for action in the future: keep the Torah, do not worship foreign gods, do not intermarry, etc., lest you be ejected from the land. By evoking the past ambiguously, Joshua can draw on its power but shift its momentum toward his desired future. Rather than take the entire past into account, Joshua's speech asks the reader to remember it in a certain light, and since the speech is situated at the end of the book, the reader may not encounter very much information that conflicts with this view.<sup>44</sup> Joshua's rhetoric works to link the past to the future, painting a continuity from what has happened toward what will happen. In the future (v. 5), Yahweh will dispossess the remaining nations just as he dispossessed them in the past (v. 9). Joshua, therefore, backgrounds annihilation and instead frames it as dispossession extending from the past toward the future. Returning to the language of Olick, Joshua redirects «the weight of the past» with his own «forces in the present» in order to create his own image of the future. It is the nature of and possibilities for dispossession in the future to which I will now turn.

#### 4. *The Future Dispossession*

The language of ירש – dispossession (*Hiphil*) and possession (*Pa'al*) – appears as a *Leitwort* throughout Joshua's speech (Josh 23:5 [2x], 9, 13). But most interesting to me, and I think of consequence for what I will continue to show, is v. 13: if Israel disobeys the covenant in the future, Yahweh will *no longer* dispossess the nations (כי לא יוסיף יהוה אליהם להוריש). Joshua is portraying the land occupation as precarious, as something that must be continually maintained and can easily be reversed if Yahweh ceases to act (prompted by Israel's choice of whether or not they will «cling to» and «intermarry» with the nations remaining [v. 12]). Even though Yahweh dispossessed the Canaanites in the past (described as a punctual

44 On the organizational effect of literary endings, see Kermode 2000.

event in v. 9 with the *Hipil waw*-consecutive (וַיִּוְרֶשׁ), he must *continuously* do so in the future. There is an infinite incompleteness to this action.

In comparison to his rather ambiguous presentation of the past, Joshua paints the future with vivid clarity. While there are a handful of references to the past, I count somewhere around twenty-eight verbs commanding what to do and reflecting what might happen in the future. But the future, according to Joshua, is precarious and could go in one of two ways. The first possibility is the ideal one in which Yahweh would continuously dispossess the remaining nations, and the Israelites would inhabit the land. But in this scenario, Israel must always be careful to cling to and love Yahweh and not mix among the remaining nations. Joshua gives no hint toward a possibility that dispossession would ever be complete. Rather, this future is always precarious and must be maintained by the Israelites through obedience – an interesting construction of the future when juxtaposed against the finality of חֵרֶם that dominates a majority of the book of Joshua as well as the narrative events on which he is drawing in Josh 23.

The ambivalence within this first possibility is further clarified in comparison to the second, which is what will happen if the Israelites turn to the remaining nations, effectively rejecting Yahweh. In this case, «Yahweh your God will no longer dispossess these nations from before you» until the Israelites «have perished from this good land» (v. 13). The only option Joshua offers for a resolution of or an end to dispossessing the remaining nations is the failure and projected end of Israel in its land. In the speech of Joshua, the future of Israel depends on continual maintenance – the process of dispossession will never be complete. The ideal future is one that never resolves. The only resolution to this ongoing occupation is one that ends with their own expulsion, which itself is set in the language of death: «and you shall perish» (וְאַבְדֶּתֶם; v. 16).

Joshua's speech activates a resolved past (the Amorite-חֵרֶם thread), reopens it for new definition as continual dispossession, and projects the significance of the past into the future. This transformation reflects, in the words of Bill Ashcroft (2009: 706), the idea that «memory is not about recovering a past but about the production of possibility – memory is a recreation, not a looking backwards, but a reaching out to a horizon, somewhere «out there»». Indeed, in projecting toward a future, Joshua's speech transforms the past and links it to a future that opens up possibilities, the ideal one of which never resolves and the non-ideal one of which does so with death. But it is not the death of the inhabitants of the land, as the Amorite-חֵרֶם thread would have suggested, but that of Israel itself. Israel's success,

on the other hand, relies on a constant, never-ending balancing act. The book of Joshua addresses the tension between total annihilation and ongoing dispossession by, in the words of Rachel Havrelock (2020: 89f), «differentiating between a national war whose success is attributed to God and the recurrent skirmishes required by settlement. At several junctures, however, this distinction breaks down, and settlement emerges as a continuous form of war». This moment is one such moment of breakdown in which Yahweh has dispossessed in the past and must «continue to dispossess» indefinitely (v. 13), exposing the ongoing precarity of Israel's future, a future that only ultimately resolves with their utter failure.

In terms of memory dynamics, this finding also suggests that one possibility behind the impulse to remember and reshape the past is that in the memory agent's perception, the future (and particularly the desirable future) may be in great danger. Whether or not they make explicit reference to the future, memory agents often mediate the past in a way that both projects toward a future they want and/or warns against a future they do not. This is one reason that the past is such contentious territory and is, in fact, always open for redefinition. In terms of the text at hand, Joshua defines the past by remembering it. He reiterates what has happened, and he links this with the future (x will happen just as x/y has happened). However, he centers the Israelites' own agency in the creation of possibilities for the future. His first (ideal) possibility in which there is no resolution exposes the precarity of the future and the need to maintain Joshua's interpretation of the past in every moment; at any point, the future can slip away. At the same time, straying from or forgetting Joshua's understanding of the past would create a different future, but this time an apocalyptic one (in the popular sense of the word) in which the Israelite experience of time ends as they «perish». For Joshua, his understanding of the past must be maintained so that the future can be maintained. If the past is at risk, then the very existence of Israel's future assumes an equal risk.

### *5. Conclusion*

Before I progress to my own conclusions, I will briefly indicate what could be said about Josh 23 in light of my findings in terms of the presentist view of cultural memory from which biblical scholarship often operates. If Josh 23 is a late insertion into the book of Joshua, we could ask why a scribe(s) would want to portray Joshua as remembering the past and projecting the future in such a way. The answer here seems obvious and is in line with the often-discussed issue of the

conflicting narratives about the complete annihilation of the Canaanites in the book of Joshua (Smend 2016: 99–110). In some instances, the **סוף** seems to have been a complete success (10:40–42; 11:16–23; 21:43–45), and in instances like Josh 23, this completion is directly contradicted. Joshua 23 also projects the completion into the future in a point toward a tragic resolution for the Israelites. These observations indicate quite clearly that the author knew about the exile, placing the *terminus post quem* for its authorship at the exilic period (Römer 2007: 82–90, 117–118, 133–136). Thus, the scribe(s) reframes annihilation as incomplete dispossession and uses the continued presence of the nations in the land to account for the current exile: Israel's inability to properly separate themselves from indigenous communities and their worship practices in particular is a breach of the covenant and is therefore the reason why Yahweh drove his own people off of their land. We could therefore see the text as commenting on the scribe's contemporary situation, and understand that the scribe's «forces in the present» would require the failure of Israel to be projected into its past.

And yet, integrating a consideration of the «weight of the past» would require that we view the material in a different light; it would allow us to center in our analysis the fact that the very act of remembering in the present (whether the agent is Joshua or scribes) requires the travel of cultural products emerging from the past through various presents; it requires the reception and reinscription of cultural products, a process during which they incur change (Erl1 2011b). There is not an invention of the past; rather, both the character of Joshua and the scribe are working with the possibilities for meaning that emerge from the cultural product that they have inherited. There is a range of what they can do in their present given the form of the cultural product that emerged from their past. As memory agents, they must navigate the weight of the past with the forces in the present.

On a narrative level, Joshua recalls his own narrative past filled with **סוף**, but in his act of remembering, he leaves space to reinscribe it toward his new concern of the future. In the same way, there was enough weight of the past within the annihilation narratives that a scribe maintained them, but as the narratives encountered the forces in the present, a transformation occurred that allowed them to remain part of the memory discourse despite recent historical events. The act of remembering requires reinscription which always changes the cultural product that has emerged from the past, even if ever so slightly; indeed, both Joshua (narratively) and the scribes (historically) transformed what the annihilation traditions *could mean* moving forward for new readers and/or new scribes responsible

for the text. To limit our view to a commentary on exile – to a story to be «fed and absorbed» in the words of Davies or a reflection of a «social mindscape» in the words of Ben Zvi – would miss the opportunity to recognize the dynamics of memory reflected in acts of remembering, and the change that cultural products undergo through these processes. In this sense, every moment of remembering is an interaction with an array of potentials emerging from the past, and in navigating these potentials in the context of present forces, agents of memory shift them and thus continuously build the path of the cultural product through time. At a moment where חרם in the past failed to be enacted and where «dispossession» is presented as the mode of fulfilling it in the future, חרם thus means differently. In Josh 23, there is no hint that חרם failed, but we indeed have to understand that it failed if the Israelites still need to «dispossess» the inhabitants. It is a slight shift in how the past is remembered, but חרם cannot mean successful complete annihilation in the past when it is reframed in the context of future dispossession.

In order to provide a balance to the presentist view, we have to break away from prioritizing memory in relation to history. If we could momentarily resist the impulse to orient our studies toward providing insight into historical actors and toward writing histories, we have the opportunity to ask new questions. We could think about memory in terms of travel and dynamics and in a constellation of other relationships that can, in the words of Ronald Hendel (2022), «adequately atten[d] to the complicated interactions of narrative style, historical reference, and cultural self-fashioning in biblical narrative». To do this, we need to analyze the ways in which memory is not just articulated, but the way in which these articulations transform it.<sup>45</sup>

From this point of view, we could follow Olick's (2016: 76, emphasis original) main argument in his book, *The Sins of the Fathers*, in which he claims that «memory is path-dependent but not unyieldingly so, shaped by the past but

45 This kind of diachronic study is represented in some work in the field, but scholars have not adequately theorized from the biblical text, meaning that as we have brought cultural memory theory into contact with our subject matter, we have neither made the theory more supple nor have we adequately allowed theoretical insights to influence how we are making our findings in the first place. In *Memoirs of God* (Smith 2004), for example, Mark Smith has a diachronic view, but he does not integrate cultural memory theory into his consideration of the texts; the bulk of his book only addresses the biblical materials. It is not until the last section that he presents «cultural memory» as a classification of these materials. The theory, therefore, is descriptive; it neither adds to the conversation in cultural memory theory nor is the theory necessarily all that productive for his work.



*not completely so, and responsive to the present but not directly so*». We could say, therefore, that Josh 23 is interacting with the event of the exile (it is responsive to the present) and that Josh 23 is attached to the Joshua text at some point as an earlier form of the latter traverses a path from the likely pre-exilic period into the exile (it is path-dependent). However, my main interest – and the consideration that could be fruitful for biblical studies more generally in its engagement with cultural memory theory – is Olick's second point here: Joshua 23, as a text that represents an act both of Joshua remembering and of a scribe(s) remembering, is shaped by the contents of the preceding narrative and by the composition history of the book of Joshua itself (it is shaped by the past). This is the point at which we can detect transformation. In order to see transformation and to see how an agent is remembering a cultural product in the present, we have to analyze how the present iteration is also a reception of past iterations. Olick calls this «the memory of memory».<sup>46</sup> Joshua 23 and the version of the past presented there is a reception of the rather different past articulated in the Amorite-חֲרָם thread. The way in which memory is shaped by the past shows us the difference between cultural products in one moment versus the next. Only by detecting such a change along a mnemotechnic path do we begin to have a fuller picture of the dynamics of memory.<sup>47</sup>

In addition to Olick's theory, we can also consider the interweaving of past, present, and future in acts of remembering. I have articulated some aspects above as I see them at work in Josh 23, but we could extend this into thinking about how perceptions of failure or incompleteness, for instance (i.e., how Israel failed to annihilate all the remaining nations or how the Joshua text might fail to be relevant during the exile without being updated), work to power cultural products over time, and how these perceptions open up opportunities for new use and redefinition.<sup>48</sup> Could there be ways in which, for example, the exile and the associated perceptions of failure were, in fact, part of what drove the Joshua text forward in

46 Memory of memory: «in addition to memory of the historical event being marked, images of the past always contain within them (explicitly or not) memory of earlier such markings» (Olick 2016: 74). While Olick is interested in how *events* are remembered, the same could be said for any cultural product.

47 Of course, biblical scholars working in *Redaktionsgeschichte* engage with ideas about diachronic textual change. But their findings have not been theorized in terms of cultural memory theory, which is what I attempt to add to the conversation here.

48 This is a question I am thinking about in response to the insights of Wenzel 2009.



time? In other words, when scribes perceive that the traditions of the past have failed in that the  $\square$  annihilation is no longer usable in the form in which they receive it, is that one of the very reasons that agents of memory are drawn to it so as to update it and make it newly usable? Is perceived failure and incompleteness in the past, in the words of Ann Rigney (2005: 18), part of what «elicit[s] intense attention on the part of those doing the remembering» so that something like the Joshua text could «become a self-perpetuating vortex of symbolic investment»? How does the organization of the past draw in agents of memory, and how does the interplay of failure and hope relate to the construction of complex temporalities in which elements of past, present, and future mix to the point of being indistinguishable?

From my perspective, the cultural impulse to organize the past in relation to traumatic events, to frame one's present as a past agent's future that they could have prevented from unfolding (i.e., the generation that Joshua warned could have prevented the exile), to do memory work «in terms of how futures are built back into the past in ways that make for the possibility of becoming [or having become] different» (Middleton/ Brown 2008: 249) – these are processes of remembering that open up questions that are fruitful for moving past a presentist view as well as the memory/history dichotomy. From this perspective, we can open up a conversation in which we can think about memory as a process rather than as a product. We can think about the entanglements of temporalities within acts of remembering. We can think about how it is that cultural products can move across time, and we can think about the changes to them that are interwoven in this process.

In this sense, transformation and changing the meanings of culturally significant stories in accordance with current social frames is actually, and perhaps counterintuitively, part of what preserves them. Cultural memory is a process made up of act after act of doing this, so that meanings shift, become multiple, and are overwritten as they come into contact with new social frames, new materials, and new meanings. The transformation of memory is an essential element for its continued existence. Returning to Amichai: how does someone preserve memory? They change it. Only complete forgetting will assure that it remains untransformed.

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### *Abstracts*

Dieser Artikel bezieht die Theorie des kulturellen Gedächtnisses in eine Lektüre von Jos 23 ein, um die Rolle der Transformation der Vergangenheit in Prozessen der Erinnerung zu untersuchen. Die Bibelwissenschaft, so wird argumentiert, hat sich bis jetzt nicht angemessen mit diesem Aspekt der Transformation bei der Artikulation des kulturellen Gedächtnisses auseinandergesetzt. Das Problem wird angegangen, indem Josuas Rede in Jos 23 als ein Akt des Erinnerns betrachtet wird, der an Diskurse der vollständigen Vernichtung (חרם) erinnert, die, kompositionsgeschichtlich gesehen, in der früheren Erzählung und in der früheren Form des Buches vorhanden sind, aber die Bedeutung des vergangenen חרם in Richtung eines Diskurses der zukünftigen, andauernden Enteignung umschreibt. Diese Studie konzentriert sich auf die Dynamik der Erinnerung und die komplexe Integration von Temporalitäten in Erinnerungsakte. Sie möchte der Bibelwissenschaft einen Raum eröffnen, in dem sie sich aus der Binarität von Erinnerung und Geschichte herausbewegt und sich eingehender mit der Frage befasst, wie Erinnerung entsteht und sich fortsetzt.

This article engages theories of cultural memory in a reading of Josh 23 in order to explore the role that the transformation of the past plays in the processes and dynamics of memory. Scholarship on memory has broadly theorized change as a central element in memory's continuous existence over time. Biblical studies, this article suggests, has not adequately addressed transformation because it prioritizes a presentist view of memory, emerging from a dichotomy between memory and history, that has not incorporated a nuanced understanding of what sociologist Jeffrey Olick has called «the weight of the past» in the articulation of memory. This article attempts to address this issue by looking at Joshua's speech in Josh 23 as an act of remembering that recalls discourses of complete annihilation (חרם) present in the earlier narrative and in the earlier form of the book, compositionally speaking, but reinscribes the significance of the past חרם toward a discourse of future, ongoing dispossession. Joshua's speech is an act of memory that reopens the closed and complete past and flips its significance into the future. This study focuses on the dynamics of memory and the complex integration of temporalities within acts of remembering in order to open up space for biblical studies to move outside of the memory/history binary and consider more deeply how it is that memory both forms and travels.

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