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Introduction

> We need history, certainly, but we need it for reasons different from those for which the idler in the garden of knowledge needs it, even though he may look nobly down on our rough and charmless needs and requirements. We need it, that is to say, for the sake of life and action.
>
> —Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

I begin with two very different stories about storytelling and memory. In a now infamous experiment from the beginning of the twentieth century, Frederic Bartlett asked Cambridge students to read and recall the Native American folktale "War of the Ghosts."[1] They read the text and then had to write it down from memory at various intervals, which ranged from fifteen minutes to many years after reading it.[2] In findings that would become influential for the study of memory for the entire twentieth century, Bartlett noted that in almost every case students produced substantially condensed and altered versions. According to Bartlett, his scientifically staged "telephone game" demonstrated the use of a "mental schema" in our memories, "an active organization of past reactions, or of past experiences."[3] In each case, Bartlett's students reproduced a narrative reconfigured from memory into a meaningful whole, even as details, proper names, and numbers were lost in the reproduction. As they reproduced the narrative over increasingly lengthy intervals, particular aspects of the story became confirmed in their memory. The story

[1] Bartlett, *Remembering*, 63–94.
[2] Bartlett, *Remembering*, 64–66.
[3] Bartlett, *Remembering*, 201.

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often stabilized in the retelling, though the more unfamiliar elements were permanently excised. These excised pieces, however, were almost always smoothed over, and the students configured the reconstructed narrative into a coherent whole in each retelling.

My second anecdote is more ancient and is closer in origin to the texts that I will be dealing with in this volume. In 2 Maccabees, one finds a self-conscious reflection on the respective usefulness of various forms of history-telling. Here the author, or more properly the epitomist, of the work has created a one-book summary of another purported contemporary composition, the five volumes written by Jason of Cyrene. The epitomist explains the reason for his abbreviation of the longer work in the following way:

> That which Jason of Cyrene told in five books, we shall attempt to abridge into a single volume.[24] For considering the flood of statistics involved and the difficulty there is for those who wish to enter upon the narratives of history because of the mass of material,[25] we have aimed to please those who wish to read, to make it easy for those who are inclined to memorize, and to profit all readers.[4]

Notably, the epitomist is writing to a literate audience, one who has the time and concern to read his tale. Still, one notes the three listed benefits of this condensed version: it is *pleasing* to those seeking knowledge, easy to *commit to memory*, and ultimately *profitable* to all readers. Each of these traits was considered a goal for historians in Hellenistic historiography. The goal of history-telling was, above all, edification.[5] According to the epitomizer of 2 Maccabees, then, the abbreviation of the work increased the work's *usefulness*.

FORM AND MEMORY

In the case of Bartlett's Cambridge students, the abbreviation of each retold tale was a function of the vagaries of human memory. Bartlett's students were being asked to read a work that was foreign to their culture and of limited value to their present. They had no basis of familiarity with the story, nor social reason to appear versed in its contents. They were also asked to read the story without any additional mnemonic aids and to reproduce it alone, without any other people who might be familiar with the story present. Stories are often shortened in the retelling simply

[4] 2 Macc 2:23–25; Adapted from the NRSV.
[5] Doran, *Temple Propaganda*, 79.

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because they are easier to remember without their extraneous details. In the second example, the epitomizer of 2 Maccabees makes a conscious decision to shorten a narrative concerning the "story of Judas Maccabeus and his brothers," a story that already had significant communal importance for his audience. He shortens the story, however, that it might be still more accessible and edifying. He shortens it for social utility.

The instances above, while different in significant ways from one another, both serve as reflections on the relative utility of forms of storytelling and how these forms facilitate remembering within a culture. In both cases, condensing and organizing the narrative information aids in later recollection and use in different contexts. In both cases, an abbreviated form is a function of *meaning-making*, an attempt to make sense of the stories (or histories) that we are told. In both cases, therefore, abbreviation constitutes a mnemonic strategy: on the one hand, a strategy to accommodate the limits of our cognitive framework, and on the other hand, a social strategy to facilitate the dissemination and use of the story within a culture.

Each of the works listed above has a different degree of relationship to the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple literature. Bartlett's work with twentieth-century Cambridge students is far removed from the time and culture of Second Temple Judaism. Second Maccabees was written in Greek by an unknown author sometime between the second century BCE and the first century CE. The epitomist is versed in Hellenistic historiographic conventions and writes from a Jewish diasporic perspective. But in each case, the examples reflect generally on the relationship between form and memory, a connection that is particularly pertinent to Hebrew Bible scholarship.

Studies of narrative and other storytelling forms in the Hebrew Bible often focus on the remarkable extended literary feats of the Pentateuch, the Deuteronomistic History, and the Chronicler's history. Several commentators in the twentieth century explicate the notable formal advances contained in the long-form narratives of the Hebrew Bible. Erich Auerbach's well-known essay compares biblical narrative to the Homeric epics. Auerbach attributes to the Hebrew Bible the development of a deep narrative "background," a psychological life in characters made up of the "simultaneous existence of various layers of consciousness and the conflict between them," and ultimately the development of a "universal history."[6] He bases this assessment of the Hebrew Bible's narrative technique on stories contained in the patriarchal narratives (Gen 22) and the history of David's rise. Gerhard von Rad also comments on the unique theological

[6] Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 12–15.

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perspective that Israel crafts in her narrative. According to von Rad, she perceives the "direct intervention of God" in each retold historical event. Narrative configuration becomes a theological tool; Israel's "unique religious faith" allows her to "see and understand as history what is really no more than a succession of isolated occurrences."[7] Wolfram von Soden also comments on the uniqueness of Israelite long-form narrative. He states decisively that "outside of Israel … there was no historical writing in the ancient Orient in the strict sense of the term."[8] He thereby attributes the birth of historical writing itself to Israel and her narrative literature.

The narratives of the Hebrew Bible have also been considered venerable precursors to the narrative innovations of nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature. Robert Alter discovers parallels between the Hebrew Bible and "prose fiction" in contrast to the "verse narratives of the ancient near East."[9] More recently, Robert Kawashima summarizes the arguments for what he calls the "novelty of biblical narrative": he states that the "Israelite writers practiced a conspicuously innovative narrative art, anticipating in striking ways the modern novelist's craft."[10]

It is in the extended narratives of Israel's national literature that we witness the development of characters fraught with background, the interconnection of simultaneous and intersecting timelines, and the construction of a distinctly action-oriented understanding of the deity's relationship to Israel. These attributes offer to biblical narrative its strange and innovative quality. Yet alongside these long narratives there exists another, less commented-upon, cultural repository of storytelling. A collection of abbreviated historical summaries appears throughout the Hebrew Bible. They are preserved in psalm collections (e.g., Pss 78, 105, 106, 135, 136) and embedded in narratives (e.g., Neh 9:5b–37). Some (e.g., portions of Pss 105 and 106 in 1 Chron 16:8–36) occur in both. They are included in prophetic collections (Ezek 20). They occur in a variety of genres, crossing (and blending) the boundaries of poetry and prose. The scrolls discovered in the Qumran desert only demonstrate further the continued cultural interest in creating and reciting these liturgical recitals of history. Among the scrolls were found a weekly liturgy that cycles through the history of Israel in seven days (4Q504–506) and several additional prayers attributed to historical figures (e.g., 4Q381).

[7] Von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, 170.
[8] Von Soden, *The Ancient Orient*, 216.
[9] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 31.
[10] Kawashima, *Biblical Narrative*, 4.

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Because of their brevity and simplicity, the historical summaries in the Hebrew Bible are occasionally overlooked in terms of their narrative innovation and utility. The emphasis on the long-form narratives as the primary achievement of biblical narrative is due, in part, to the marked preference within biblical scholarship for the perceived innovations of long complex narratives over simple, oral, and archaic poetic utterances.[11] As can be seen even from the brief statements noted above concerning biblical narrative's characteristic innovation, these authors often had the extended verse narratives of Ugarit, Assyria, and Babylon as their primary point of cultural comparison. Within this paradigm, the biblical narrative prefigured modern prose fiction over against the mythological worldview characteristic of the ancient Near East and its poetic storytelling forms. Is it possible, however, that the very features of the historical summary in the Hebrew Bible that have caused them to be overlooked as sources of narrative innovation are instead features of their particular mnemonic value?

While the debate continues concerning the exact "literacy" rates of the population at various points in Israel's history, it is a point of consensus among scholars that the majority of the Hebrew Bible was written, collated, and disseminated in a period during which functional literacy among nonelites in ancient Israel remained low. An extensive scribal class did develop to serve the elite, but as Christopher Rollston and Ian Young have argued, the Hebrew Bible itself remains "primarily a corpus written by elites to elites."[12] There is some evidence to suggest a more widespread "semi-literacy," the ability to read and produce relatively simple texts or to label objects with one's name.[13] This level of ability, however, is a far cry from the ability needed to read and reference the large historical books of ancient Israel. It is notable then, that alongside the extended narrative works of the Hebrew Bible that have received so much attention within the academy, the Hebrew Bible also preserves a set of abbreviated schematic presentations of these same stories, which largely repeat the same episodes and are presented as oral performance. A scholarly story has been told in which oral performance precedes

[11] See extended critique of this assumption in Vayntrub, *Beyond Orality*, 70–102.

[12] Rollston, "The Extent of Literacy in Ancient Israel," 127–136; Young, "Israelite Literacy," 239–253, 408–422.

[13] Rollston, "The Extent of Literacy in Ancient Israel," 127. See also the evidence that Hess uses to argue for widespread literacy, in Hess, "Literacy in Iron Age Israel," 82–102. The evidence he presents does indeed suggest a level of widespread *semi*-literacy. See Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew*, 103–113.

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written narrative, in which modes of history-telling move from "song to story." Such a narrative makes sense of some features of the biblical account, such as the paired accounts of the crossing of the Red Sea in Exod 14–15 and the two accounts of Jael's slaughter of Sisera in Judges 4–5.[14] But it does not account for the fact that poetic performances of an abbreviated historical summary not only do not *end* within the biblical narrative, Qumran community, or early Jewish and Christian communities but *thrive* as a communal mode of storytelling.

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF "FORM"

My thesis for this volume is simple: forms of storytelling matter. Literary forms shape social patterns of engagement with the past, facilitate transmission, and shape the identity expressions of the community. In the case of the historical summaries, literary form, the particular features of which will be outlined below, facilitates acts of commemoration that are memorable, participatory in nature, include the people, and are disconnected from political modes of power. The thesis is simple, but the instantiations of this storytelling mode in the Hebrew Bible are thrillingly complex. The historical summaries are a case study for the relative communal utility of various forms in which memory can be written, spoken, and transmitted. This introduction articulates my methodological and theoretical approach to the question of the relationship of *form* to *memory*. I will begin by defining "form" as I will use it in this volume, and secondly, I will situate this concept within the study of texts as the bearers of "cultural memory" in the Hebrew Bible. I will also introduce the particular formal features of the historical recitals that make them such a socially strategic resource for commemoration in the ancient world: *schematization*, the formation of a "*usable past*" or "*functional memory*," and their presentation as communal *performances*.

The "Little Historical Creed": From Form Criticism Back to Form

As will be seen, it is assumptions regarding what various forms of texts can *do* that have determined scholarly approaches to these abbreviated presentations of Israel's history. The evolutionary framework whereby short and

[14] See Robert Kawashima's lucid account of this development in Kawashima, *Biblical Narrative*, 21–32.

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simple poetic utterances were presumed to be early and primitive and to preserve vestiges of early cultic performances, while long-form narratives were developments of these early utterances, dominated the analysis of these historical summaries in the twentieth century. The most influential assessment of this abbreviated storytelling form was undertaken by von Rad in his *Das formgeschichtliche Problem des Hexateuchs*.[15] As can be seen from his title, he characterized the "problem" of the Hexateuch as a fundamentally form-critical one. Since he identified it as a form-critical problem, he sought to discover its solution in the formal precursors of the lengthy narrative preserved in Genesis through Joshua. He discovered this narrative precursor in several brief historical summaries contained in its text, beginning with Deut 26:5b–9, the text known in brief as "my father was a wandering Aramean." According to von Rad, these texts preserved remnants of an ancient "creed" that originated in cultic contexts. This "little historical creed" that he identifies describes a consistent set of events that outline the "canonical pattern of the saving history."[16] The oldest examples of this creed are preserved in Deut 6:20–24, 26:5b–9, and Josh 24:1–13, and constituted Israel's earliest historical and theological articulation of their faith.[17] This early schematic narrative outline was then expanded into what would become the Hexateuch. Later forms of this creed, found for example in 1 Sam 12:8–15, Pss 105, 135, 136, and Exod 15, are cultic vestiges of an ancient performance of this basic narrative schema expanded to include events that postdate the conquest.[18]

In the course of what would become a very influential exposition, von Rad posited three fundamental points concerning these "little creeds": (1) the creed was *old*, or in any case pre-Deuteronomic, (2) that it was actually celebrated in the cult, and (3) that it was fundamentally a collective utterance.[19] All three of his fundamental points have since been challenged.[20] The texts that von Rad had assumed were *early* were shown

[15] Von Rad, *Das formgeschichtliche Problem des Hexateuchs*. This volume was later translated as "The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch," 1–78.

[16] Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 123.

[17] One of the most common critiques of von Rad's hypothesis is the early dating of these texts. See Hyatt, "Were There an Ancient Historical Credo?," 152–170; Rost, "Das kleine geschichtliche Credo," 12–22.

[18] Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2:123.

[19] Kreuzer, *Die Frühgeschichte Israels*, 21–22.

[20] The demise of the foundations of his theory concerning the relationship of this "little historical creed" to the Hexateuch is chronicled in Kreuzer, *Die Frühgeschichte Israels*.

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to be *late*, either Deuteronomic or post-Deuteronomic.[21] They did not predictably precede the extended narratives, but often followed them, as abbreviations of longer texts rather than primitive forms thereof. Secondly, von Rad's assumption concerning the role of these recitals in the cultic practices of Israel did not account for the variety of settings that these texts assume as spaces of performance.[22] Siegfried Kreuzer observes, for example, that several of these abbreviated recitals are presented as taking place within the family and not the cultic sphere.[23] Von Rad's redactional conclusion that the recitals demonstrate a distinction between Exodus and Sinai traditions in Israel's early histories was challenged on the parallels with ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaties: Herbert B. Huffmon argues that the "little historical creed" functions as the historical prologue to the establishment of the covenant, represented in the Sinai event.[24] While von Rad's theory was initially influential, later scholars determined that the texts identified by von Rad were not relevant for either of his primary questions concerning the prehistory of the Hexateuch or the form of Israel's early cultic practice.[25]

These analyses challenged aspects of his theory concerning the dating, life situation, and cultic role of the "little historical creed." But a larger methodological issue also unduly constrained von Rad's theory. von Rad had sought in the texts that I will call *historical summaries* a window into the past, an entrée into Israel's cultic practice preceding the complex theological work of the Yahwist. His interpretation of these recitals was rooted in unexamined evolutionary assumptions, in the sense that he assumed that simple short forms, with their characteristic "rhythmic and alliterative" quality, are early (the creeds, which "concentrat[e] on the facts alone") and that more complex forms (such as the Hexateuch and later "epic elaboration[s]" of the basic form of the recital) develop later.[26] The very poetic simplicity of the creedal expressions led to his assumption that they are ancient. While the "form" and its features revealed early cultic practice, the "contents" contributed to the larger theological program of the Hexateuch. In his analysis, von Rad assumed a movement from the simple to the complex, from the oral to the literate, and from the liturgical to the theological.

[21] Rost, "Das kleine geschichtliche Credo"; Kreuzer, *Die Frühgeschichte Israels*.
[22] Kreuzer, *Die Frühgeschichte Israels*, 23–24.
[23] Kreuzer, *Die Frühgeschichte Israels*, 23–24.
[24] Huffmon, "The Exodus, Sinai, and the Credo," 107.
[25] Kreuzer, *Die Frühgeschichte Israels*, 75.
[26] Von Rad, "Form-Critical Problem," 4n3.

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Von Rad's analysis, and others like it, reflects the dominant epistemological model of evolution native to form criticism. Form criticism in particular will be addressed below, as it is key to the critical shift in formal analysis that I seek to argue. I set these concerns aside for a moment, however, to address the second group of textual analyses that reveal another critical paradigm that has occupied analyses of the historical summaries. These analyses focus on how the historical summaries function as a *reception* of the extended literary works upon which they are assumed to be based. The summaries, therefore, can be analyzed using tradition-historical or intertextual methods as a resource to discern how Israel was reading and rereading the long-form narrative histories. This group of analyses too, though less obviously than the form-critical ones, seeks in the historical summaries a window into the reading practices of ancient Israel, in this case by identifying textual links between these recitals and the sources and traditions from which they are understood to be derived. Studies in this category include both detailed analyses of single texts[27] and studies encompassing a related group of texts,[28] and are fundamentally "intertextual," asking how different events are selected from the biblical narratives and reinterpreted through specific viewpoints.

Examples of this type of analysis include Judith Newman's treatment of Neh 9 and related extrabiblical texts in her 1999 book *Praying by the Book: The Scripturalization of Prayer in the Second Temple Period*. Newman examines only Second Temple prayers, as indicated by the title, including Neh 9:5b–37, Judith 9:2–14, and 3 Macc 2:2–20. In these prayers, she identifies a mode of representing Israel's history that she calls "scripturalization," an engagement with the "collection of texts that would eventually become the Jewish and part of the Christian Bible."[29] This scripturalization, according to Newman, can take three forms: (1) "exact or nearly exact citation," (2) reuse of a phrase whose sources are identifiable or that has become a stock phrase, (3) and a more diffuse allusion.[30] In each of these cases, her primary emphasis is on the use of "written traditions – and interpretive traditions" that "have become the means by which the past is recalled."[31] She emphasizes how later texts are reading and interpreting earlier texts.

27 Boda, *Praying the Tradition*; Leonard, "Historical Traditions in Psalm 78".
28 Newman, *Praying by the Book*.
29 Newman, *Praying by the Book*, 11.
30 Newman, *Praying by the Book*, 81–82.
31 Newman, *Praying by the Book*, 61. See Eskenazi's critique of this assumption. She notes that "the emphasis on a written precedence is problematic because it depends on

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So too, Sophie Ramond in her excellent and detailed volume on the intrabiblical exegesis of the historical psalms, uses the "careful analysis of vocabulary and the expressions used" as the point of departure for her study of the reprisal of traditions in the psalms.[32] This analysis of textual links presents the historical summary as an intricate patchwork quilt of references to previously written texts, stretching from the Torah through to the prophets. Her study is careful in its method and comprehensive in its treatment of the five "historical psalms" (Pss 78, 105–106, 135–136), but it does not always account for the very feature that von Rad observed: that the story told and retold in the psalms is a form that is "basically unchangeable and allows liberty of adjustment only in insignificant ways."[33]

Another work, published the same year as Ramond's, and that covers a similar set of texts (Exod 15, Pss 78, 105–106, 114, 135–137, and Neh 9), is Anja Klein's *Geschichte und Gebet*.[34] While her study will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2 on the historical psalms, I present her method briefly here because it relates to larger patterns of analysis. Klein's study is decidedly tradition-historical and redaction-critical, but, unlike the focus of previous studies, she analyzes the reception of a particular historical thread through prayer texts. In this, she demonstrates an admirable analysis of how prayer as a particular form of speech might influence the historical expression it contains. She analyzes the reception of a historical thread that begins in Exod 15 and continues in Pss 78, 105–106, 114, and 135–137 before culminating in Neh 9, in which a history contained in prayer is transferred back into a narrative context.[35] Her stated goal is to outline "the reception of biblical history in the psalms of the Old Testament"[36] and she accomplishes this goal in three ways. First, she profiles how the tradition-historical process of rereading a core of historical events is accomplished in the psalms. Second, she analyzes how the reception of these historical texts influences the formation of the Psalter as a whole.

assumptions regarding the formation of the Bible that can no longer be made without some explanation." Eskenazi, "Nehemiah 9–10," 1.7.

[32] Ramond, *Les leçons et les énigmes du passé*, 9. Translated by author.

[33] Von Rad, "Form-Critical Problem," 7.

[34] Klein, *Geschichte und Gebet*; Klein also summarizes her primary arguments in "Praying Biblical History," 400–426.

[35] Klein, "Praying Biblical History," 401.

[36] Klein, *Geschichte und Gebet*, 1. Translated by author.

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