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Remembering or Forgetting Jerusalem? The Cultural Trauma of Exile

Abstract.

Using the Babylonian siege and exile as a case study, the paper examines how collective trauma was transformed into cultural memory and became constitutive of communal identity. The paper asks what enables a destroyed city to remain “alive” and how Jerusalem came to function as the singular idealized city of ancient Judah. Engaging the memory theory of Jan Assmann and the concept of cultural trauma developed by Jeffrey C. Alexander, it analyses two distinct trauma management strategies reflected in biblical texts. Ezekiel interprets the destruction theologically, framing exile as divinely ordained punishment and thereby rendering the catastrophe meaningful within a framework of guilt and repentance. In contrast, an anonymous psalmist preserves an emotional and symbolic attachment to the ruined city through an oath of remembrance and loyalty. Both figures function as cultural carriers who integrate the trauma of exile into the community’s self-understanding. By sustaining Jerusalem as a central reference point in cultural memory, they ensure that the destroyed city endures as a marker of collective ethnic and religious identity.

Keywords: cultural memory, cultural trauma, Ezekiel, Psalm 137, Babylonian exile

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Introduction

Based on archaeological evidence,² we know that the land of Judah did not remain empty after the Babylonian siege, as described in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel (Ez 39:28–29).³ Rather, life in Judah continued without Jerusalem, albeit with a drastically decreased population.⁴ In brief, following the deportations and the destruction of the city's central buildings – the Temple and the royal palace –, Jerusalem was left deserted, and the remains of the city were used as a source of building stone by the local population.⁵

We can formulate the questions as follows: What keeps a city alive? More precisely: what keeps a destroyed city alive? What strengths and values did Jerusalem possess that enabled it to survive its physical destruction? How and why did Jerusalem become the only “idealized city” of ancient Judah?

Using the siege of Jerusalem as an example, this paper will reflect on how collective traumas become part of a community's cultural memory and shape its collective identity drawing on the memory theory of J. Assmann and the concept of cultural trauma of J. Alexander.

Definitions of Trauma and Cultural Memory

The “trauma of Babylonian exile” is a simplified expression that incorporates many traumatic events such as destruction, siege, deportation and resettlement, and new start in a foreign socio-cultural and political milieu that we would call today “forced

² LIPSCHITS, Oded (2021): *Age of Empires: The History and Administration of Judah in the 8th–2nd Centuries BCE in Light of the Storage-Jar Stamp Impressions*. Pennsylvania, Eisenbrauns.

³ See further the concept of “the myth of empty land”. For example, LIPSCHITS, Oded (2003): *Where Is the “Myth of the Empty Land” to Be Found? History versus Myth*. In: Lipschits, Oded – Blenkinsopp, Joseph (eds.): *Judah and Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*. Winona Lake (IN), Eisenbrauns. 55–74.

⁴ FINKELSTEIN, Israel (2024): *Jerusalem. The Center of the Universe: Its Archaeology and History (1800–100 BCE)*. SBL Press.

⁵ KÖSZEGHY, Miklós (2023): *Jeruzsálem – Egy rejtőzködő város története*. Budapest, Martin Opitz Kiadó. 184.

migration” and “culture shock”, which also involve the loss of religious and political stability. All these events have a profound impact not only on an individual but also on a communal level.⁶

Ruth Poser summarizes the attitudes towards traumatic experiences, highlighting two fundamental yet contrary impulses:

[O]n the one hand, the violence that victims have suffered preoccupies them and constantly intrudes on their thoughts; on the other hand, victims try as hard as they can to ward off feelings of anxiety, pain, and helplessness, and to protect themselves from everything connected with the trauma. The term *intrusion symptoms* is used to describe states in which victims relive the traumatic situation; they include intrusive thoughts, nightmares, and flashbacks. Contrasting *constriction symptoms* may appear as psychological numbing, rigidity, and social withdrawal.⁷

Furthermore, in agreement with other scholars, Poser highlights the term *desymbolization*, which is used to describe the total breakdown of meaning that occurs during traumatization. Desymbolization is a kind of “defensive mental state in which psychic space can be said to be frozen, experience cannot be accessed, and mental connections are destroyed”, resulting in a lack of meaning and a sense of control.⁸ Thus, healing processes can be considered as processes of (re)symbolization. According to Poser, the concepts *desymbolization* and *resymbolization* bring together the individual and collective traumatization. Consequently, considering biblical accounts of exile as “trauma literature” is not just a historical record of the traumatic events but also a means of facilitating the healing and recovery process.⁹

According to the scholarly agreement, a collective trauma can refer to the physical, psychological, or mental impacts of catastrophic events on groups, societies, and nations.

A collective trauma becomes a transgenerational trauma precisely through passing down, as it is considered an indispensable element of the community’s cultural memory and identity. It is also important to mention Varmik D. Volkan’s idea of the “chosen

⁶ See, for instance KELLE, Brad E. (2009): Dealing with the Trauma of Defeat. The Rhetoric of Devastation and Rejuvenation of Nature in Ezekiel. In: *JBL*. 128. 469–490.

⁷ POSER, Ruth (2023): Ezekiel as Trauma Literature. In: Carvalho, Corrine L. (ed.): *The Oxford Handbook of Ezekiel*. New York, Oxford University Press. 438.

⁸ KÜHNER, Angela (2002): *Kollektive Traumata-Annahmen, Argumente, Konzepte: Eine Bestandsaufnahme nach dem 11. September*. Berlin, Berghof Forschungszentrum. 58–63.

⁹ POSER 2023, 439.

trauma”,¹⁰ which belongs to the conscious transgenerational trauma, as it refers to a community’s collective decision to incorporate a catastrophic or traumatic event into its identity through various forms of representations. The chosen trauma therefore represents an essential unifying power for members across generations.¹¹

A socio-cultural approach to collective trauma has been discussed more recently, which goes beyond a purely psychological interpretation of trauma. One of the leading scholars in this field is Jeffrey C. Alexander, who introduced the concept of “cultural trauma”. Alexander clarifies that cultural trauma is not an automatic consequence of the catastrophic events, experience of suffering, discomfort, or pain. Rather, the collective experience of suffering and despair become trauma when the acute discomfort enters into the core of the group’s sense of its own identity.¹² Furthermore, this happens when the social and historical circumstances make it possible to create powerful symbolic representations and convincing metanarratives that are produced by influential actors, e.g. intellectuals who have interest in interpreting and reinterpreting the past events and integrating them into the community’s collective identity, defining in this way its future.

At this point, the cultural memory theory of Jan Assmann is of crucial importance, as it describes how memory works within a remembering community. Although Assmann does not focus primarily on traumatic events, his approach is very helpful in discussing and understanding the dynamics, i.e. the role of agents and of cultural-theological products that contribute to transforming collective catastrophic events into cultural traumas. Cultural memory as it is defined by J. Assmann “refers to one of the exterior dimensions of the human memory, which initially we tend to think of as purely internal... However, the contents of this memory, the ways in which they are organized, and the length of time they last are for the most part not a matter of internal storage or control but the external conditions imposed by society and cultural context.”¹³

¹⁰ VOLKAN, Vamik D. (2001): Transgenerational Transmissions and Chosen Traumas: An Aspect of Large-Group Identity. In: *Group Analysis* 34, 1. 87 ff.

¹¹ Op. cit. 89 ff.

¹² ALEXANDER, Jeffrey C. (2004): Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma. In: Alexander, Jeffrey C. – Eyerman, Roy – Giesen, Bernhard – Smelser, Neil J. – Sztompka, Piotr (eds.): *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. University of California Press. 10.

¹³ ASSMANN, Jan (2011): *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*. Cambridge University Press. 5.

Furthermore, the cultural memory is inevitably selective and involves the process of “remembering” the elements of the past that should not be forgotten under any circumstances – in other words, the past of a community as it is remembered and not how it happened. This type of connection to the past provides bases for the collective identity of the remembering group because it reaffirms the group’s identity time and again. Therefore, it becomes one of the key reference points for the community to express its identity. Moreover, cultural memory belongs to the sphere of conscious reflection, which does not occur spontaneously within a group. Rather, it is distributed by “special carriers” such as priests, teachers, or scribes.¹⁴

In our case, Ezekiel, the prophet of the exiled Judeans, and the psalmist representing the musicians in Babylonia act as special carriers.

Traumatic Discourse in the Book of Ezekiel: Jerusalem

There is no doubt that the trauma of exile is central to the theology and content of the book of Ezekiel. The experiences of the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem and the deportations are articulated in various ways. In my previous research, I studied the identity markers found in the Book of Ezekiel such as the Sabbath, rewritten history, and an exclusivist ideology. My current research focuses more on the trauma of exile that motivated Ezekiel to develop these markers of identity.

Due to the limitations of the paper, I will present but a few examples of traumatic guilt in Jerusalem as described in the Book of Ezekiel below.

The first mention of Jerusalem in Ezekiel 4:1–8 announces the impending siege of the city through a symbolic act: the laying of a brick, the construction of siege-works, and the building of a siege wall against it.

And you, O mortal, take a brick and set it before you. On it portray a city, Jerusalem; ² and put siegeworks against it, and build a siege-wall against it, and cast up a ramp against it; set camps also against it, and plant battering rams against it all around. ³ Then take an iron plate and place it as an iron wall between you and the city; set your face toward it, and let it be in a state of siege, and press the siege against it. This is a sign for the house

¹⁴ Op. cit. 33–40.

of Israel. [...] ⁶ When you have completed these, you shall lie down a second time, but on your right side, and bear the punishment of the house of Judah; forty days I assign you, one day for each year. ⁷ *You shall set your face toward the siege of Jerusalem, and with your arm bared you shall prophesy against it.* ⁸ See, I am putting cords on you so that you cannot turn from one side to the other until you have completed the days of your siege. (Ez 4:1–3.6–8)

Secondly, in Ezekiel 5, the guilt and punishment of Jerusalem – its destruction and exile – are specified further, beginning with the dreadful act of using a sharp sword as a barber’s razor.

But she has rebelled against my ordinances and my statutes, becoming more wicked than the nations and the countries all around her, rejecting my ordinances and not following my statutes. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you are more turbulent than the nations that are all around you, and have not followed my statutes or kept my ordinances, but have acted according to the ordinances of the nations that are all around you; therefore thus says the Lord GOD: I, I myself, am coming against you; I will execute judgments among you in the sight of the nations. And because of all your abominations, I will do to you what I have never yet done, and the like of which I will never do again. (Ez 5:6–9)

The following images related to the punishment of Jerusalem are even more dreadful: “Surely, parents shall eat their children in your midst, and children shall eat their parents; I will execute judgments on you, and any of you who survive I will scatter to every wind” (Ez 5:10).

Thirdly, chapters 8 and 9 discuss the further wickedness of Israel and of Jerusalem and their deserved and inevitable punishment by God. The following two chapters (Ez 10–11) belong to this prophetic vision and tell of the glory of the Lord, rising and leaving the threshold of the house of God because of Jerusalem’s abominations (Ez 10:18). Ezekiel 11 goes on to discuss the foreshadowed punishment of the “city”. Notably, the name “Jerusalem” is not mentioned at all. Hence, the text suggests that Jerusalem is abandoned by God. Ezekiel 11:13 poses the prophet’s desperate question about the future of the remnant of Israel: “Ah Lord GOD! Will you make a full end of the remnant of Israel [שְׂאֵרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל]?” In response, the oracle of promise is pronounced:

a new covenant is promised to the exiles, emphasized by the fact that after leaving the sanctuary and Jerusalem, the glory of the Lord goes to the exiles by the River Chebar:

Then the word of the LORD came to me: ¹⁵ Mortal, your kinsfolk, your own kin, your fellow exiles, the whole house of Israel, all of them, are those of whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, “They have gone far from the LORD; to us this land is given for a possession.” ¹⁶ Therefore say: Thus says the Lord GOD: Though I removed them far away among the nations, and though I scattered them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a little while in the countries where they have gone. ¹⁷ Therefore say: Thus says the Lord GOD: I will gather you from the peoples, and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. [...] I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, so that they may follow my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God. (Ez 11:14–17.19–20)

Fourthly, in Ezekiel 16, the life of Jerusalem, the “city wife” is presented, starting from her birth as an unwanted baby girl who was treated cruelly, being thrown into an open field without receiving the most essential care. In fact, she was left to die (vv. 4–5). However, God found her and took pity on her, protecting her until she was grown up. In verse 8, God passed by the young woman-Jerusalem, who was “at the age of love”. He covered her nakedness, swore to her, and entered a covenant with her, giving her beautiful clothing and jewellery. Jerusalem became the bride of God: a prestigious woman and the delight of her divine husband.

The word of the LORD came to me: Mortal, make known to Jerusalem her abominations, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD to Jerusalem: Your origin and your birth were in the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite, and your mother a Hittite. As for your birth, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor wrapped in cloths. No eye pitied you, to do any of these things for you out of compassion for you; but you were thrown out in the open field, for you were abhorred on the day you were born. I passed by you, and saw you flailing about in your blood. As you lay in your blood, I said to you, “Live! and grow up like a plant of the field.” You grew up and became tall and arrived at full womanhood; your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; yet you were naked and bare. I passed by you again and looked on you; you were at the age for love. I spread the edge of my cloak over you, and covered

your nakedness: I pledged myself to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord GOD, and you became mine. Then I bathed you with water and washed off the blood from you, and anointed you with oil. I clothed you with embroidered cloth and with sandals of fine leather; I bound you in fine linen and covered you with rich fabric. I adorned you with ornaments: I put bracelets on your arms, a chain on your neck, a ring on your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown upon your head. (Ez 16:1–11)

However, Jerusalem became ungrateful and unfaithful, committing the most serious of abominations (e.g. engaging in foreign cults and forming coalitions with great empires such as Egypt and Assyria). Her insatiable sexual appetite leads her to commit adultery with Egyptians, Assyrians, Canaanites, and Chaldeans (vv. 28–29). She is even described as a “brazen prostitute” (v. 30). Hence, Jerusalem is presented as a guilty, unfaithful, and treacherous woman whose wickedness was greater than that of Sodom or Samaria. She betrayed and humiliated her husband. As a punishment, she is destroyed and humiliated. Consequently, Jerusalem returns to her former state of being “naked and bare” (v. 39), as in her childhood.¹⁵

But you trusted in your beauty, and played the whore because of your fame, and lavished your whorings on any passer-by. You took some of your garments, and made for yourself colourful shrines, and on them played the whore; nothing like this has ever been or ever shall be. [...] How sick is your heart, says the Lord GOD, that you did all these things, the deeds of a brazen whore; building your platform at the head of every street, and making your lofty place in every square! Yet you were not like a whore, because you scorned payment. Adulterous wife, who receives strangers instead of her husband! Gifts are given to all whores; but you gave your gifts to all your lovers, bribing them to come to you from all around for your whorings. So you were different from other women in your whorings: no one solicited you to play the whore; and you gave payment, while no payment was given to you; you were different. [...] I will judge you as women who commit adultery and shed blood are judged, and bring blood upon you in wrath and jealousy. I will deliver you into their hands, and they shall throw down your platform and break down your lofty places; they shall strip you of your clothes and take your beautiful objects and leave you naked and bare. (Ez 16:15–16.30–34.38–39)

¹⁵ FURMAN, Rafael (2020): Trauma and Post-trauma in the Book of Ezekiel. In: *OTE* 33, 1. 44.

Fifthly, Ezekiel 23 builds on the theme of Ezekiel 16 by describing Jerusalem as a “city wife”. While Ezekiel 16 focused on a single woman, Ezekiel 23 tells the story of two wicked sisters, Oholah (Samaria) and Oholiba (Jerusalem), who are married to God. Both sisters commit adultery with lovers from different nations. The chapter opens with the accusation of adultery (v. 3), stating that Jerusalem’s guilt is even more serious because she witnessed the fate of her older sister, Oholah, yet failed to learn from it. Instead, she continued her abominations, turning to foreign gods and making wrong political decisions, such as forming a coalition with Assyria and Babylonia, who desecrated her with “their harlotry” (v. 17). Jerusalem’s punishment is pronounced again: destruction, the deportation of her sons and daughters, and shame and ridicule at the hands of the Babylonians. This is consistent with Deuteronomy 22:22, which sentences an adulterous woman to death.

Mortal, there were two women, the daughters of one mother; [...] She did not give up her whorings that she had practised since Egypt; for in her youth men had lain with her and fondled her virgin bosom and poured out their lust upon her. Therefore I delivered her into the hands of her lovers, into the hands of the Assyrians, for whom she lusted. [...] Her sister Oholibah saw this, yet she was more corrupt than she in her lusting and in her whorings, which were worse than those of her sister. [...] When she carried on her whorings so openly and flaunted her nakedness, I turned in disgust from her, as I had turned from her sister. [...] They shall come against you from the north with chariots and wagons and a host of peoples; they shall set themselves against you on every side with buckler, shield, and helmet, and I will commit the judgment to them, and they shall judge you according to their ordinances (Ez 23:2.8–9.11.18.24).

Chapter 33 recounts the report of a refugee messenger from Jerusalem, announcing, “In the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month, on the fifth day of the month, someone who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, “The city has fallen!” (Ez 33:21).

In summary, the depiction of Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel corresponds to the symptoms of constriction summarized by Poser. The distance from Jerusalem is also evident in the vocabulary used. The name “Jerusalem” appears 26 times in chapters 4–36. The more neutral term “city”, which can carry negative connotations, appears 43 times, evenly distributed throughout the book. To highlight the significance of this number, it is worth noting that the name of Jerusalem appears 106 times in the Book of Jeremiah.

Ezekiel, a prophet of the exiled people, a survivor of war and deportation, and a man who was forced to leave his city and the sanctuary to which he presumably belonged as a priest, distances himself from Jerusalem and the trauma associated with its loss. The examples I provided are clear evidence of *desymbolization* and *resymbolization*.

Thus, we see an example of the struggles experienced by people who have been traumatized, which manifest mentally in the form of humiliation. This humiliation is caused by forced migration, which can deprive people of their socio-religious and cultural existence. In many cases, this goes hand in hand with the guilt and shame experienced by trauma survivors. Ezekiel's trauma is closely related to the concept of traumatic guilt, as detailed in Ezekiel 5 and subsequent chapters up to Chapter 33.

From a trauma-informed perspective, we can argue that this attitude stems from the “cultural trauma” whereby the prophet distances himself from the catastrophe and shapes his group's identity. By presenting Jerusalem as a wicked city that deserved its fate, the prophet makes the whole unacceptable situation bearable and provides hope for the future in the form of restoration and an eternal covenant.

Say this to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: As I live, surely those who are in the waste places shall fall by the sword; and those who are in the open field I will give to the wild animals to be devoured; and those who are in strongholds and in caves shall die by pestilence. I will make the land a desolation and a waste, and its proud might shall come to an end; and the mountains of Israel shall be so desolate that no one will pass through. Then they shall know that I am the LORD, when I have made the land a desolation and a waste because of all their abominations that they have committed. (Ez 33:27–29)

Traumatic Discourse in Psalm 137

Psalm 137, one of the most famous psalms, reflects the despair of the deported community as seen through the eyes of the psalmist. Like Ezekiel, they were presumably either survivors of the deportations or witnesses to the fall of Jerusalem, or descendants of these people. They suffered from the trauma of exile, which, as I have previously argued, can be considered a “cultural trauma”.

Before turning to the text, it is worth briefly mentioning the recurring elements of the communal lament psalms:

- Plea: address to God, complaint, petition, motivations, imprecation;
- Praise: assurance of being heard, payment of vows, doxology and praise.¹⁶

In this respect, Psalm 137 is a very unusual psalm. Some elements of the laments are omitted: most notably, the address to God, the request, the motivation, the doxology, and the praise. This makes it truly authentic, as it speaks of the deepest point of suffering, where there is no room for compliance with religious sentiment.¹⁷

Another peculiarity of this psalm is that it addresses Jerusalem, a city, rather than God. The *structure* of Psalm 137 can therefore be outlined as follows:¹⁸

I. Suffering (vv. 1–4)

By the rivers of Babylon—there we sat down and there we wept
when we remembered Zion.

On the willows there we hung up our harps.

For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” How could we sing the LORD’S song in a foreign
land?

II. Loyalty (vv. 5–6)

If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand wither! (literally: Let my right hand forget about me!)
Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth,
if I do not remember you,
if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.

III. Despair: curses against Edom and Babylon (vv. 7–9)

Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites
the day of Jerusalem’s fall,
how they said, “Tear it down! Tear it down!
Down to its foundations!”

¹⁶ BRUEGGEMANN, Walter (1985): *The Message of the Psalms*. Augsburg Fortress. 54–56.

¹⁷ LUKÁCS, Ottília (2024): Panaszszoltárok, ellenségzsoltárok: Van-e helyük az ima műfajában? In: Zamfir, Korinna et al. (eds.): „Megmutatom szentségemet” (Lev 10,3). *Tanulmányok a szent megmutatkozásairól Nóda Mózes 65. születésnapjára*. Budapest – Cluj-Napoca, Szent István Társulat – Verbum. 425–426.

¹⁸ LUKÁCS 2024, 425.

O daughter Babylon, you devastator!
Happy shall they be who pay you back
what you have done to us!
Happy shall they be who take your little ones
and dash them against the rock!

In what follows, I will turn to the second part of the oath of allegiance in verses 5–6. The keywords of the oath, “forgetting” and “remembering”, also centre on Jerusalem. The chiasmic structure, organized in a protasis–apodosis form, creates an unrealistic construction that reinforces the oath’s message, namely, “It is impossible to forget Jerusalem!”

A Protasis

If I forget you, O Jerusalem,

B Apodosis

let my right hand wither! (literally: Let my right hand forget about me!)

'B Apodosis

Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth,

'A Protasis

if I do not remember you,

if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.

Although the cultural trauma is the same as in the case of Ezekiel, an entirely different attitude is evident here. The psalmist, presumably speaking on behalf of a group of musicians who were possibly cultic singers in the Temple of Jerusalem, conveys his distress, helplessness, and despair at being exiled. Indeed, this psalm conveys the impossibility of fully communicating the trauma. He describes their despair and humiliating situation, saying that their tormentors expect them to sing carols of Zion in a foreign land, far from Jerusalem. Their tense condition and overwhelming emotions prevent them from singing; instead, they swear allegiance to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the most precious heritage of the exiled group, the holiest city, the only place where one can sing songs of Zion and praise God with sincerity. The dramatic aspect of this oath is that it is presumably made to fallen Jerusalem. This attitude is more consistent with the previously mentioned intrusion symptoms, which are characterized by the inability or unwillingness to distance oneself from the traumatic situation.

Concluding Remarks

Returning to our main question of “What keeps a destroyed city alive?”, we consider the trauma-management strategies employed by the exiled community through the lens of their special carrier figures such as Ezekiel and an unknown psalmist.

As it transpires from the above-quoted passages, the exiled people maintained their ethnic identity and connections to Jerusalem, while developing a *modus vivendi* in the new geo-socio-political environment. We observed two distinct coping strategies that incorporated the trauma of exile into the community’s self-perception. Drawing on the theories of Jeffrey Alexander and Jan Assmann, we could gain a better understanding of how these strategies worked: they kept the cultural memory of Jerusalem as a reference point for the deported group’s identity.

Ezekiel maintains a mental and emotional distance from Jerusalem. He interprets the trauma of exile in the light of the Priestly and Deuteronomistic theology, which renders it comprehensible. The survivors, due to their feelings of guilt and shame, often blame themselves instead of their Babylonian perpetrators. This notion of traumatic guilt is evident in the Book of Ezekiel, particularly in passages relating to Jerusalem, where the collective catastrophe of exile is treated as a deserved punishment for the abominations committed at all levels of society. The historical perpetrator, the Babylonian king, is seemingly exempt. Ezekiel goes so far as to state that God alone is responsible for the exile; the Babylonians are merely instruments of punishment in his hands.

As the psalmist approaches the subject of the fall of Jerusalem, his intention is to ensure that its memory remains alive. In the form of a prayer, the speaker addresses Jerusalem and makes a heart-wrenching oath of allegiance. This is presumably addressed to the destroyed city.

In both cases, the phenomenon of chosen trauma relating to Jerusalem became a marker of collective ethnic identity. Accordingly, the prophet Ezekiel and the psalmist assume the role of cultural carrier, responsible for the preservation and dissemination of Jerusalem’s cultural memory.

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