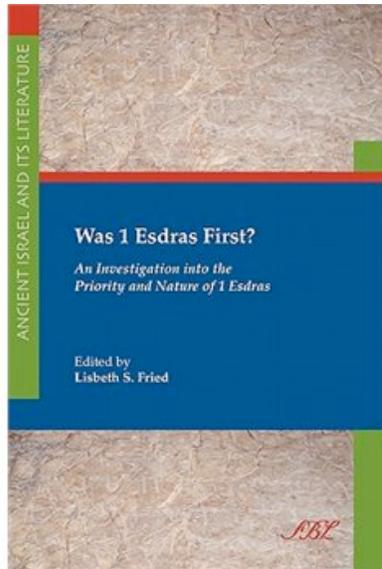


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***Was 1 Esdras First? An Investigation into the Priority and Nature of 1 Esdras***

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## 1. Introduction

The relationship of Greek 1 Esdras and Hebrew Ezra-Nehemiah has long figured into discussions of the early postexilic era in Persian Yehud, the historical reconstructions of the work of Ezra and Nehemiah, and the development of various Ezra traditions. Lisbeth Fried's book arose out of the chicken-and-egg question about which came first: Ezra-Nehemiah or 1 Esdras. It contains a series of essays first presented at a number of sessions at SBL Annual Meetings on this topic—sessions that were largely organized by Fried. Following a short introduction, this volume contains three articles arguing against the priority of Ezra-Nehemiah (and in favor of 1 Esdras's priority), seven arguing for the priority of Ezra-Nehemiah, and six that investigate the nature of 1 Esdras without arguing the issue of priority. The book also includes an extensive bibliography related to 1 Esdras and indices of authors and ancient sources cited in the essays.

## 2. Papers Arguing for the Priority of 1 Esdras

Dierdre Fulton and Gary Knoppers's "Lower and Higher Criticism: The Case of 1 Esdras" argues that textual criticism can shed light on source- and redaction-critical issues. Moreover, in their examination of the parallels in 1 Esd 2:15 and Ezra 4:6–11a, they argue

that the shorter 1 Esdras passage is earlier than the longer Ezra passage. The Ezra passage is more complicated and refers to several letters to Persian kings. The redactor of Ezra, they assert, wanted to demonstrate that there was sustained opposition to the Judean's rebuilding efforts in Jerusalem, so he inserted more letters. This would argue that 1 Esdras preceded Ezra-Nehemiah. Primarily an argument based on the text-critical principle of *lectio brevior*, Fulton and Knoppers understand that that principle is only founded on general observation and is not a hard-and-fast rule. Thus, they also note that 1 Esdras does not mention multiple letters. This is an indication that it was not simplifying the complicated text of Ezra 4, since the compiler of 1 Esdras could have condensed multiple letters to a simple notice that the Judeans wrote several letters to Persian kings, something he did not do.

Though they present an interesting thesis, I was ultimately unconvinced by Fulton and Knoppers. Let us consider the thesis that the author of 1 Esdras was simplifying what he thought a complicated Ezra text with multiple letters into a text that was more streamlined and less confusing: Why would he have preserved the mention of several letters simply because his exemplar mentioned several letters? Was there some ancient custom (unknown to me) that required him to mention several letters if he was making such a condensation? Perhaps the redactor thought the reason to simplify was that the text of Ezra contained too many letters. In this case he could have boiled the text down to one letter on purpose. In that case he would not have wanted to mention multiple letters despite his source's contents. It seems to me that one could argue that supposedly complicated Ezra 4:6–11a was the precursor to a redactor-simplified 1 Esd 2:15 just as easily as arguing priority in the opposite direction.

In "Chicken or Egg? Which Came First, 1 Esdras or Ezra-Nehemiah?" Lester Grabbe takes a more general approach in arguing that 1 Esdras preceded Ezra-Nehemiah. Grabbe first presents a short analysis of the contents and sources behind 1 Esdras and then a number of arguments in favor of its priority. He contends that 1 Esdras and Ezra-Nehemiah were composed in stages, with the earliest stage being an Ezra source that lies behind 1 Esd 2; 5–9/Ezra 1:1–4:5; 5–10; Neh 8. The compiler of Ezra-Nehemiah supposedly removed Neh 8 from its original position and incorporated it in Nehemiah using a separate Nehemiah tradition. Grabbe's theory is based in part on earlier source-critical conclusions that Neh 8 was originally from the earliest Ezra traditions. I find this contention questionable, since its major assumption is that, since Ezra is mentioned in this chapter, this material must stem from an Ezra source. Why must every mention of Ezra have come from this theoretical source? Could not other traditions also have mentioned Ezra? In the end, Grabbe argues not that 1 Esdras was the source for Ezra-Nehemiah but that each arose independently from an Ezra tradition and a Nehemiah Memoir. However, 1 Esdras (without the story of the three bodyguards) was the earlier

composition. Moreover, Grabbe theorizes that 1 Esdras's original ending was an account of the feast of Sukkoth that balanced the book's beginning with the Passover. This conjecture is based on Neh 8:14–18 as well as the supposed abrupt and unnatural ending of 1 Esdras. Grabbe is apparently unaware of Arie van der Kooij's analysis of the ending of 1 Esdras ("On the Ending of the Book of 1 Esdras," in *The Seventh Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies* [ed. Claude E. Cox; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991], 37–49).

Adrian Schenker's "The Relationship Between Ezra-Nehemiah and 1 Esdras" argues that, based on literary differences between 1 Esd 2–7 and Ezra 2; 5–7, 1 Esdras must be the earlier work. He notes that in 1 Esdras there are two parallel accounts of the same episode of opposition to rebuilding the temple, while in Ezra these two are presented as separate events. Ezra is mainly interested in the rebuilding of the temple, while 1 Esdras reports the building of Jerusalem's walls, marketplaces, and temple. He argues that the narrative in Ezra is most likely to be secondary for two reasons. First, in 1 Esd 5:60 the older Judeans weep as they see the completed new temple, whereas Ezra 3:12 portrays them weeping over the foundation of the new temple. Since they are comparing Solomon's temple to the newer temple, Schenker believes that 1 Esdras must be the older text, because the comparison is between similar items—completed temples—a common motif in narrative. I find his reasoning suspect, since he rejects the notion that the harder narrative (Ezra) may have been smoothed to the more expected and easier narrative (1 Esdras). Schenker's reason for rejecting this is that the criterion of the harder reading is a text-critical principle, not a narrative analysis. However, in this case it is not a text-critical principle but a logical one—there would be no reason to compare Solomon's completed temple to a mere foundation *unless this was the more original tradition*. Considering that both 1 Esdras and Ezra claim the temple was completed during Darius's reign, it is most likely that the older Judeans who had seen Solomon's temple would have wept over the mere foundation, suspecting that they would never see the newer temple completed.

The second reason Schenker believes 1 Esdras to be prior to Ezra is that 1 Esd 5:70 provides a space of only two years between the reign of Cyrus and the second year of Darius for serious obstruction of the work on the temple by the enemies of the exiles. Since this element is lacking from Ezra 4:5, Schenker reasons that the compiler of Ezra purposely omitted it in order to increase the perceived difficulty in completing the temple project. He proposes that the tendency of scribes or editors was to increase, not diminish, the difficulty encountered by the builders. However, this is mere conjecture, and Schenker offers no evidence for this supposed tendency. It seems to me that the two years at 1 Esd 5:70 is just as likely to be a secondary element that arose from confusion of the chronology in Ezra, if Ezra were prior to 1 Esdras. In addition, Schenker argues that

1 Esdras is the more plausible narrative, since the exiles brought back the vessels from Solomon's temple and would have needed a secure place to store them. First Esdras presents this with the immediate building of the walls of the city and a storehouse. However, this could also be used to argue that 1 Esdras is another redactional smoothing of a difficulty from Ezra-Nehemiah, which does not explain how the vessels were secured before the building of the temple and, later, Nehemiah's wall.

### 3. Papers Arguing against the Priority of 1 Esdras

Bob Becking's "The Story of the Three Youths and the Composition of 1 Esdras" argues that the story of the three bodyguards (1 Esd 3–4) is an integral part of the book, not a later addition. This is contrary to the opinion of those who argue the priority of 1 Esdras who view the story as a later addition to the book (including all three of the previous essays). Becking points to three reasons for his opinion. First, he notes the character of the Greek language of the story, which he claims is substantially the same as the rest of 1 Esdras except for a few variations that can be explained by the different genre of the story. Second, he supports the view of Zipporah Talshir that 1 Esdras is "a section deliberately cut out from Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah to form a framework for the story of the youths." Finally, holding that the story is a later addition does not solve any problems of the anomalies that exist in 1 Esdras. Becking claims that many of these anomalies did not trouble ancient readers and do not need resolution.

Moving on from these three points, Becking notes that Ezra 1–6 and 1 Esd 1–7 have different views regarding the resumption of temple building in postexilic Jerusalem. In Ezra the resumption is due to divine intervention, but in 1 Esdras it comes about because of the competition among the bodyguards and the piety of Zerubbabel. The story of the competition relates three answers to what is the strongest—wine, the king, wisdom—but the third answer is supplemented with the exception that truth is the strongest of all. Becking claims that each of these plays an important role in 1 Esdras, making the story of the bodyguards integral to the book itself. Wine is implied in the banquet scene and also is mentioned at 1 Esd 6:29 as part of the tribute paid to Zerubbabel. The strength of the king is important throughout 1 Esdras. Women are referenced several times and are an especially powerful force that needs to be combated because of the exogamy of the Judeans (cf. 1 Esd 8:89). Truth, Becking claims, is connected by Zerubbabel with the God of Israel (1 Esd 4:40), making it a theme that runs throughout 1 Esdras. This last contention is the weakest, however, since truth is seldom mentioned outside the story of the three bodyguards, though Becking observes an important occurrence at 1 Esd 5:40. This leads Becking to conclude that 1 Esdras is a Maccabean-era composition that lent ideological and moral support for those who wanted to cleanse Jerusalem's temple from foreign influence. In contrast, Ezra is better suited to the Persian period around 400 B.C.E.

In “The Second Year of Darius” Kristin De Troyer examines all of the occurrences of “second year” in Ezra and 1 Esdras as well as Haggai and Zechariah. In this connection she notes that the work on the temple is halted only once in Ezra but twice in 1 Esdras. Ezra contains but one verse between Ezra 4:23–24 and 5:1, whereas the parallels in 1 Esdras (2:25 and 6:1–2) have 160 verses intervening. Because the author of 1 Esdras inserted this intervening material between the first and second cessations of building the temple and because he portrays the second resumption of building in connection with the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah, he was forced to clarify the chronology and add that they prophesied in the second year of Darius (1 Esd 6:1), a phrase missing from the parallel in Ezra (Ezra 5:1). This indicates that 1 Esdras is a reworking of the earlier material in Ezra. De Troyer’s essay is well-argued. However, at one point she calls the mention of a second year at Ezra 3:8 a mention of “the second year of Darius,” which it is clearly not (see 75).

Lisbeth Fried’s “Why the Story of the Three Youths in 1 Esdras?” begins by noting that the two main positions on the priority of 1 Esdras differ on their view of the origin of the story of the three bodyguards. Those who maintain that 1 Esdras was prior to Ezra-Nehemiah believe that the story (1 Esd 4–5) was not originally part of the book, whereas those who believe 1 Esdras to be derivative of 1 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah view the story as an integral part of the original text. She begins by examining a number of issues usually used to defend the priority of 1 Esdras: the duration of the cessation of temple building; differences in the letters sent to Persian kings; differing roles for Ezra 4:24 and 1 Esd 2:25; and differences in chronology. In each case she demonstrates that none of these are convincing, since some can be viewed as neutral in deciding priority while others make a better case for the priority of Ezra over 1 Esdras. She then turns to ancient Near Eastern temple-building accounts to demonstrate that both Ezra and 1 Esdras in general follow the conventions for reporting temple-building activity, though with some variations. One item in both Ezra and 1 Esdras that is not normally found in such literature are the reports of opposition, especially the inclusion of letters. It is in this feature that Fried sees evidence for Ezra’s priority over 1 Esdras. The letters to the Persian kings have been moved before the story of the three bodyguards, and this, Fried believes, was to absolve Zerubbabel from any culpability in triggering the delay in completing the temple (cf. Ezra 4:2–4). Instead, the story of the bodyguards provides Zerubbabel with an alibi (he was a guardsman in Darius’s court) and elevates his status. Thus, Fried concludes that there is ample reason to conclude that 1 Esd 1–7 was a purposeful rearrangement of Ezra 1–6.

Juha Pakkala’s “Why 1 Esdras Is Probably Not an Early Version of the Ezra-Nehemiah Tradition” examines nine parallel texts from 1 Esdras and Ezra-Nehemiah. He aims to demonstrate that in many cases 1 Esdras is most likely the result of an editorial change of

an older text that is preserved in the MT of Ezra-Nehemiah. The nine cases Pakkala examines are: (1) an omission in 1 Esd 8:5–6 that removed a repetition in Ezra 7:7–9; (2) Ezra 4:6–11 rewritten in 1 Esd 2:15; (3) rearrangement in 1 Esd 5:56 that attempted to improve Ezra 3:9; (4) Ezra 4:12 rewritten in 1 Esd 2:24; (5) 1 Esd 9:49–55 implies late additions to Neh 9:9–12; (6) rendering of the *golah* expansions in 1 Esdras; (7) reversal of roles of Ezra and Artaxerxes in 1 Esdras; (8) Ezra called high priest in 1 Esdras; and (9) Sabbath sacrifices inserted in 1 Esd 5:51 (par. Ezra 3:5). In a number of instances Pakkala is directly challenging the conclusions of Dieter Böhler’s textual analysis of the relationship of 1 Esdras and Ezra. Overall, Pakkala’s analysis is persuasive, and I would have only minor objections. For instance, he views the repetition in Ezra 7:7–9 as a result of editorial expansion that was later corrected in 1 Esdras. I agree that 1 Esdras is apparently an attempt to correct Ezra at this point, but I am not convinced that the repetition in Ezra was a later editorial expansion. I may well have been a purposeful repetition to emphasize the work of God in Ezra’s mission (cf. Ezra 7:9).

Zipporah Talshir’s “Ancient Composition Patterns Mirrored in 1 Esdras and the Priority of Canonical Composition Type” argues that the compiler of 1 Esdras rearranged material from Ezra in order to accommodate the tale of the three bodyguards. Talshir uses examples from ancient literature, especially LXX 1–4 Kingdoms (MT Samuel–Kings) and Chronicles, to illustrate how compilers worked with texts. For instance, the beginning and ending of 1 Esdras appears to be odd and abrupt. However, the same phenomenon can be found in Chronicles, which starts its account of the kingdoms in the middle of Saul’s reign and ends in mid-sentence—a sentence that is completed in Ezra. Moreover, just as 1 Esdras adds a large block of material with the story of the bodyguards, which is only peripherally related to the storyline of the rest of the book, so also LXX Esther and Daniel add blocks of material. The prayers of Azariah and of the three young men in Daniel have little relationship to the rest of Dan 3. At several points Talshir refutes the arguments of Böhler—especially his criticism of her earlier work on 1 Esdras—and the language of her essay becomes somewhat acute at these points. Nevertheless, it appears to me as if Talshir has had the better of their exchange.

In “Literary Questions between Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1 Esdras” James C. VanderKam proposes to classify 1 Esdras as rewritten Scripture—though this is not a genre classification but a technique used to present an interpretive reading of an earlier book. Thus, for VanderKam 1 Esdras “presents us with perhaps the most ancient interpretation of the book of Ezra and the earliest attempt to cope with puzzles in it.” Two major characteristics of 1 Esdras highlight its nature as rewritten Scripture. The first is the portrayal of Zerubbabel, who is made much more prominent than in Ezra. This is accomplished most obviously by the insertion of the story of the three bodyguards. In addition, the compiler makes Zerubbabel more prominent in three passages: 1 Esd 6:18

(par. Ezra 5:14), 1 Esd 6:7 (par. Ezra 6:8), and 1 Esd 6:29 (par. Ezra 6:8). VanderKam notes, "Each of these unique references is problematic in some sense, and all of them have the look of notes inserted into an existing but less detailed text. Such a state of affairs is more consistent with the idea that 1 Esdras is a revision." Furthermore, 1 Esdras attributes traits of Nehemiah to Zerubbabel. For example, in 1 Esd 4:47–48 Darius grants to Zerubbabel provisions given by Artaxerxes to Nehemiah at Neh 2:7–8. A second major characteristic of 1 Esdras is the reordering of material in Ezra. VanderKam highlights the moving of the Artaxerxes correspondence as a (mistaken) attempt to clarify the chronological difficulties in Ezra 4:7–24a. Thus, these major features of 1 Esdras reveal it as rewritten Scripture whose aim was primarily exegetical.

In "Remember Nehemiah: 1 Esdras and the *Damnatio Memoriae Nehemiae*," Jacob L. Wright argues that one purpose of 1 Esdras was to erase the memory of Nehemiah. After surveying ancient attempts to rewrite the past by removing the names of prominent people who had fallen into disfavor, Wright argues against the thesis of Böhler that 1 Esdras was written before Ezra-Nehemiah. That thesis contrasts the state of Jerusalem as depicted in 1 Esdras (restored and inhabited in the time of Zerubbabel and Ezra) and Ezra-Nehemiah (the city in ruins until Nehemiah's era), in order to propose that the book Ezra was written to prepare for the rebuilding of Jerusalem by Nehemiah. Instead, Wright believes that 1 Esdras shrewdly passes over the rebuilding of the city in order to eliminate Nehemiah's role. Thus, Wright argues in contrast to Böhler that Ezra-Nehemiah is the older work.

Wright then examines the passages in Ezra-Nehemiah and 1 Esdras that mention soldiers and cavalry (Ezra 8:22; Neh 2:9b; 1 Esd 5:2; 8:51–52). Here he detects that Ezra 8:22 was composed with Neh 2:9b in mind. Ezra does not request a cavalry escort, relying on God, whereas Nehemiah was sent to Jerusalem with an escort. Wright believes the implication is that Nehemiah was less pious than Ezra. When turning to 1 Esdras, he proposes that its presentation of Zerubbabel as being sent to Jerusalem with one thousand cavalry was designed to present the imperial court as much more favorable to him than it was to Nehemiah. Wright lastly considers the final passage in 1 Esdras, which is parallel to Neh 8. Here Ezra is described as chief priest and reader as opposed to simply scribe, as in Neh 8. From all of this evidence, Wright concludes that 1 Esdras was purposely erasing the memory of the layman Nehemiah in favor of a more priestly oriented view. Nehemiah disciplined errant priests, whereas 1 Esdras elevates the temple and the priesthood. This also argues, according to Wright, that 1 Esdras must be consciously reshaping the earlier material in Ezra-Nehemiah.

Of all of the essays supporting the priority of Ezra-Nehemiah over 1 Esdras, I found Wright's the least persuasive. I am not at all convinced that Ezra 8:22 was composed with

Neh 2:9b in mind. To make this argument Wright is forced to argue that these passages must be read as literary constructions without any historical connections behind them. Placing such a large chasm between literary and historical concerns seems to me to be highly artificial and necessitates assuming one's conclusion as a part of one's premise. Moreover, while 1 Esdras pays no attention to Nehemiah, I am not persuaded by Wright's argument that it is purposely attempting to blot out his memory.

#### 4. Articles That Examine the Nature of 1 Esdras

In "The Image of the King(s) in 1 Esdras," Sebastian Grätz examines the roles that kings play in 1 Esdras. Starting with Josiah and ending with Artaxerxes, these portrayals of kings as patrons of the temple and its cultus serve to show the Persian kings as temporarily replacing the role of the earlier Judean monarchy—they enable and foster the religious needs of the Judeans until the restoration of the temple is completed. Foreign kings were able to be evaluated against the benchmark established by Josiah.

Paul B. Harvey Jr. contributes "Darius' Court and the Guardsmen's Debate: Hellenist Greek Elements in 1 Esdras." He demonstrates that the contest of the bodyguards has its origins in Greek history, historiography, and rhetoric. The title *kinsman of the king* (1 Esd 3:7) is peculiar to Ptolemaic Egypt in the third century B.C.E., placing the origin of the story and its list of officials in that era or later. The debate is a combination of two Greek literary genres, the deliberative/persuasive *logoi*, as in Herodotus's debate over the best form of government, and *progymnasmata*, student compositions on topics assigned by classical rhetorician schoolmasters. Such school texts were common in all major cities during the second century B.C.E., including Alexandria. This argues for a second-century origin for the story of the bodyguards.

Sylvie Honigman's "Cyclical Time and Catalogues: The Construction of Meaning in 1 Esdras" argues that both Ezra-Nehemiah and 1 Esdras are pursuits of collective identity through stories about rebuilding Jerusalem. Darius is associated with the temple's restoration, although Cyrus, the founder of the Achaemenid dynasty, should have been credited with the sanctuary's rebuilding. Therefore, the concept of time in both books is critical to this shifting of honor to Darius. Honigman believes that in Ezra-Nehemiah time is presented linearly, but in 1 Esdras it is viewed as cyclical. First Esdras contains three cycles, each with a king, prophets, a leader of returning Judeans, holy vessels, the returnees themselves, a disruption, and a successful restoration of the cosmic order in altar, temple, and law. Only the cycle involving Darius is complete. According to Honigman, the cyclical structure of the narrative serves to anchor the author's present in the founding events of the past. Honigman's cyclical structure of 1 Esdras seems to me to be a gallant attempt to explain the structure and message of 1 Esdras, but is ultimately too

complicated and intricately structured. She must allow for missing elements in two of the three cycles in order to make them somewhat parallel to the only complete cycle among the three. I find her analysis somewhat too strained to be plausible.

Sara Japhet's "1 Esdras: Its Genre, Literary Form, and Goals" asks why 1 Esdras was composed. She concludes that the compiler was attempting "to create a new historical picture of [the postexilic restoration period] in the history of Israel." First Esdras divides this period into three phases: the end of the Judean period (1 Esd 1), the return from exile and rebuilding of the temple and city (1 Esd 2–7), and the establishment of religious norms and practices (1 Esd 8–9). These three phases form a continuum, and to show the continuity among them 1 Esdras transfers Jerusalem's rebuilding to the beginning of the restoration era under Zerubbabel. At the end of the third period, leadership is entrusted to a high priest, as in the author's own era. Thus, 1 Esdras legitimates the political situation in the author's time and sanctions the ideology that supported it.

In "The Rendering of 2 Chronicles 35–36 in 1 Esdras," Ralph Klein argues that we possess the original beginning of 1 Esdras, and therefore it is not a fragment from a larger, now lost history produced by the Chronicler. The Chronicler reports that Josiah transformed sinners in Judah into a perfectly obedient people, but 1 Esd 1:22 portrays them as persisting in sin. Moreover, Chronicles notes that Josiah was slain by Pharaoh Neco's archers, but according to 1 Esdras he died from illness. Both of these disagreements preclude any arguments that 1 Esdras originally included 1 Chr 34. In addition, a pun that exists in 1 Esd 1:21–22 cannot be retrojected into Hebrew, and these verses have no parallel in 1 Chronicles, demonstrating that 1 Esdras must have begun with its present text, a reworking of 2 Chr 35–36.

Hugh Williamson contributes "1 Esdras as Rewritten Bible?" In this final essay in the volume, he inquires as to why 1 Esdras was written and why its author chose this particular form. He proposes that it is an example of "rewritten Bible." This not a formal genre classification but a technique of selecting blocks of biblical text, reordering them, and re-presenting them with additional material and interpretive comments. Williamson believes that viewing 1 Esdras as rewritten Bible allows readers to appreciate the author's message by recognizing his method and its exegetical aims.

## 5. Conclusions

The aim of this volume, according to its subtitle, is to investigate the priority and nature of 1 Esdras. The diversity and range of these sixteen essays provide readers with a good sampling of contemporary thought on these issues. It seems to me, however, that those who argue for the priority of Ezra-Nehemiah have made a better case for their position

than those who favor the priority of 1 Esdras. Not only is the priority of Ezra-Nehemiah favored by more than a two-to-one ratio in the papers in this book, but it appears to me that those who argue for the priority of 1 Esdras present arguments easily countered by those who argue in favor of Ezra-Nehemiah. Moreover, some of the arguments of advocates of 1 Esdras's priority are completely circular. For instance, Grabbe argues that both 1 Esdras and modern scholarship conclude that Neh 8 was originally part of the Ezra tradition but became displaced from it in Ezra-Nehemiah, making it likely that 1 Esdras was composed before Ezra-Nehemiah (37). However, modern scholarship did not come to this conclusion independent of 1 Esdras, since 1 Esdras was part of the evidence for it. In addition, it appears that the papers in the third section on the nature of 1 Esdras, while not arguing the issue of priority nevertheless lend themselves more to supporting the priority of Ezra-Nehemiah over 1 Esdras.

In the end, this is a good volume for anyone interested in exploring the current state of scholarship on 1 Esdras, its nature, and its relationship to Ezra-Nehemiah. Lisbeth Fried is to be commended for organizing the SBL discussion of this topic and providing the academy with the good selection of essays in this book.