

## Edom as Israel's Other

Our investigation in Chapter 1 revealed diverse and competing memories of Israel's earliest encounters with its neighbors. The disparities are especially noteworthy in the case of the Edomites. In this chapter, we explore a number of other texts related to this population, as they illustrate how the biblical scribes engaged in war commemoration when negotiating relations with surrounding peoples. We begin with the story of Jacob and Esau in the book of Genesis and then proceed to survey the memories of the Edomites constructed throughout the biblical corpus. By combining these literary witnesses with external evidence from archeological research, we will be able to appreciate with more nuance both the kinds of issues and the scribal responses that shaped a wide variety of biblical texts.

### ISRAEL'S FIRST HOMECOMING

The book of Genesis addresses issues posed by the Edomites through the proxy of their ancestor Esau, the twin brother of Jacob/Israel. Already *in utero*, the relationship between the two boys is characterized by strife and rivalry, and when Jacob, with the help of his mother, purloins the paternal birthright due to Esau, he must flee to save his own skin. During their years of separation, Esau becomes a mighty warrior, while Jacob grows into a wealthy patriarch, with many children, servants, and livestock.

Eventually, Jacob decides to move his family back to the land of his birth. As he prepares for his homecoming, he sends servants ahead to greet his brother in the hopes of gaining his favor (Gen. 32:4–6). The entreaty communicated to Esau resembles the one Moses sends to the Edomite king

(Num. 20:14–17), recounting developments over a period in which Jacob/Israel and Esau/Edom had become separated. The petition falls on deaf ears, and just as the Edomite king arms his people to fight the Israelites during the days of Moses, Esau musters a band of 400 warriors and marches out to confront Jacob's clan.

Jacob responds to Esau's aggression by separating his camp (*mahaneh*, a term with military connotations) into two divisions and attempting to placate Esau's anger with a gift (*minhah*) of his flocks. (Throughout the story, the authors play with the Hebrew terms "camp" and "gift," which differ only in the order of two consonants.) During the night, Jacob engages in a wrestling match with a mysterious stranger, and the contest transforms the patriarch as he prepares to meet his brother. His competitor changes his name from Jacob to Israel, who subsequently declares that "I've seen God face to face, and my life is rescued" (Gen. 32:31).

When Jacob meets Esau the next morning, he bows seven times. The respect he shows his brother provokes a change of heart. Esau runs and embraces Jacob, falling on his neck and kissing him amidst mutual tears. "Accept this gift from me," Jacob insists, "for I have seen your face as I have seen the face of God, and you have received me favorably" (Gen. 33:10). After reluctantly accepting a portion of the flock Jacob offers him, Esau volunteers to escort Jacob's clan to their destination. In the end, Jacob diplomatically turns down the offer, and the brothers part ways on peaceful terms.

The substratum of this account from Genesis may predate the episode with the Edomites in the book of Numbers, yet over time it has evolved into a complex counter-memory to the hostility portrayed in Numbers: long before the days of the exodus, when the Edomite king harassed the Israelites as they were making their way to their homeland, Esau had called off his troops and offered to deploy them to help Jacob's clan find safe passage to this same land. As one side in this tug-of-war-commemoration, the story of Esau's rapprochement with and solicitude for Jacob in Genesis affirms the possibility that fraternal relations between Israel and Edom could be reestablished in the present.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On the rarely treated relationship between this account and the one in Numbers, see Dennis T. Olson, *Numbers*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox, 1996), 131; Elie Assis, *Identity in Conflict: The Struggle Between Esau and Jacob, Edom and Israel* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2016); and Christian Frevel, "'Esau, der Vater Edoms' (Gen. 36,9.43): Ein Vergleich der Edom-Überlieferungen in Genesis und Numeri vor dem Hintergrund der historischen Entwicklung" in Mark Brett and Jakob Wöhrle (eds.), *The Politics of the Ancestors*,

## MEMORIES OF EDMITE AGGRESSION

The tale of these fraternal twins is a study of opposites. “Esau was a skillful hunter and a man of the field, while Jacob was a mild man, one who dwells in tents” (Gen. 25:27).<sup>2</sup> Although the brothers ultimately part in peace, Esau’s pugnacious character mirrors the bellicose proclivities attributed to the Edomites in a number of biblical texts. Thus, the book of Samuel portrays a figure named “Doeg the Edomite” perpetrating a massacre at the town of Nob on King Saul’s behalf (1 Sam. 22:9–23). Describing how an Edomite took sides against the beloved hero David and contributed to the destruction of an Israelite town, this tale would have incensed readers who were already inclined to think of the Edomites as an especially violent and vicious people.<sup>3</sup>

The books of Samuel and Kings present Saul and David subjugating the Edomites (1 Sam. 14:47; 2 Sam. 8:13–14). After David’s death, “Yhwh raised an adversary against Solomon, the Edomite Hadad, who was of the royal family of Edom” (1 Kings 11:14–22). Later, the Edomites break away and establish a king of their own. In retaliation, the Judean kingdom sends chariot divisions against them, but the campaign is unsuccessful. “Thus Edom has rebelled against Judah’s sovereignty until the present day” (2 Kings 8:20–22; see also 2 Kings 14:7 and 16:6). Judean resentment resounds throughout these records of Edom’s rise.<sup>4</sup>

In an oracle from the book of Amos, Yhwh promises to reestablish “the fallen booth of David,” which will seize territory from the Edomites and “all the other nations called by my [i.e., Yhwh’s] name” (Amos 9:12).<sup>5</sup>

*Exegetical and Historical Perspectives on Genesis 12–36* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 329–364.

<sup>2</sup> The description feminizes Jacob and reminds us of Jael, “the most blessed of women in tents”; see the discussion in Part IV, as well as Robert S. Kawashima’s incisive remarks on the character of Jacob in his essay “Literary Analysis” in Craig A. Evans, Joel N. Lohr, and David L. Petersen (eds.), *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 83–106. On the Jacob account more broadly, see Yair Zakovitch, *Jacob: Unexpected Patriarch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> That the tale is about Doeg qua Edomite is clear from the way in which Saul’s guards refuse to attack the priests at Nob (or Gob – see Chapter 9) so that Saul commissions Doeg to do it. In fulfilling his commission, Doeg massacres not merely the eighty-five priests there but also all the women, children, and animals.

<sup>4</sup> On the kingdom of Edom, see Juan Manuel Tebes, “The Kingdom of Edom? A Critical Reappraisal of the Edomite State Model” in Ianir Milevski and Thomas E. Levy (eds.), *Framing Archaeology in the Near East: The Application of Social Theory to Fieldwork* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2016), 113–122.

<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the Song of Deborah speaks of Yhwh coming from Edomite territory (see Judg. 5:4 and the discussion in Part IV).

This same work begins with a series of oracles against the nations, in which Edom is harshly censured for participating in the trade of war captives. “Edom pursued his brother with the sword, repressed all pity [alternatively: “destroyed wombs”], maintained his anger perpetually, and preserved his fury forever” (Amos 1:6–12).<sup>6</sup>

Pronouncements of judgment upon Edom, similar to that in Amos, appear repeatedly in prophetic writings, often as retribution for Judah's/Zion's fate.<sup>7</sup> For example, Ezekiel proclaims:

Thus said the Lord Yhwh: Because Edom acted vengefully against the House of Judah and incurred guilt by wreaking revenge upon it—therefore, thus said the Lord Yhwh: I will stretch out my hand against Edom and cut off from it man and beast, and I will lay it in ruins; from Tema to Dedan they shall fall by the sword. I will wreak my vengeance on Edom through my people Israel, and they shall take action against Edom in accordance with my blazing anger; and they shall know my vengeance, declares the Lord Yhwh. Ezek. 25:12–14

Unwarranted brutality in wartime is a common theme in the broadsides against the Edomites.<sup>8</sup> Psalm 137, an appeal not to forget Jerusalem, accuses the Edomites of taking pleasure in the rape of the city during the days of the Babylonian conquest:

Remember, Yhwh, the children of Edom on the day of Jerusalem,  
the ones who cried, “Strip her, strip her to her very foundations.”  
Ps. 137:7

The short book of Obadiah consists of a single pronouncement of divine judgment on Edom, and the imprecation is vindicated, once again, by appealing to the memory of Edomite actions against their own kin in wartime:

For the slaughter and violence done to your brother Jacob,  
shame shall cover you,  
and you shall be cut off forever.

On the day that you stood aside,  
on the day that strangers carried off his wealth,

<sup>6</sup> See Carly L. Crouch and Jacob L. Wright, “Military Crimes” in Brent Strawn et al. (eds.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 46–53.

<sup>7</sup> See Bert Dicou, *Edom: Israel's Brother and Antagonist: The Role of Edom in Biblical Prophecy and Story* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> As seen in Ezek. 35:15; Isa. 34, 63; and perhaps implicitly in Joel 4:19 and Mal. 1:4; see also the discussion of a wide range of Edomite texts in Claire R. Matthews, *Defending Zion: Edom's Desolation and Jacob's Restoration (Isaiah 34–35) in Context* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995).

and foreigners entered his gates  
and cast lots for Jerusalem,  
you too were like one of them.

But you should not have gloated over your brother  
on the day of his misfortune;  
you should not have rejoiced over the people of Judah  
on the day of their ruin;  
you should not have boasted  
on the day of distress.

You should not have entered the gate of my people  
on the day of their calamity;  
you should not have joined in the gloating over Judah's disaster  
on the day of his calamity;  
you should not have looted his goods  
on the day of his calamity.

You should not have stood at the crossings  
to cut off his fugitives;  
you should not have handed over [betrayed] his survivors  
on the day of distress.

Obad. 10–14, NRSV<sup>9</sup>

Edom's lack of brotherly love manifested itself concretely in their purloining of Jerusalem's wealth, their glee on the "day of Judah's calamity" (a play on "Edom"), and their slaughter/betrayal of war refugees.<sup>10</sup>

#### THE POLITICS OF SCAPEGOATING

Thus far, we've seen how biblical scribes reproached the Edomites by constructing memories of their unbrotherly behavior in wartime. These memories reflect deep misgivings toward Edom, an attitude to which Deuteronomy responds with its injunction not to abhor Edomite kin. The fervor of these exchanges begs the question: What is it about this population that elicited such a vigorous volley of texts?

The Edomites must have long occupied the attention of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, but the increased attention they receive in advanced stages of the Bible's composition history must be appreciated against the backdrop of events in years directly before and after the Babylonian

<sup>9</sup> NRSV refers to the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, published in 1989 by the National Council of Churches.

<sup>10</sup> The glee theme is found elsewhere (e.g., Ezek. 36:5). On these texts, see Ehud Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study of the Book of Obadiah* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1996).

conquest. During this period, Judah surrendered much of its southern territory (beginning just north of Hebron) to the Edomites/Idumeans. Several documents found at Arad in the south of Judah, which probably date to 598/597 BCE, refer to Edomite incursions into the region and the crimes perpetrated by this population against Judah at a time of weakness.<sup>11</sup>

While the memories of Edom's wartime transgressions likely have a basis in historical realities, they appear to have been embellished and inflated for the sake of polemic. It's noteworthy that the Babylonian sources and the oldest biblical depictions of the demolition refer only to the Babylonians and fail to mention Edomite involvement. The book of Jeremiah, moreover, reports that Judeans had sought refuge in a number of places, including Edom, whence they returned after hearing that the king of Babylon had taken measures to repopulate Judah.<sup>12</sup> Why then do so many of the biblical texts we have just surveyed accuse the Edomites of betraying Judah?

In several insightful studies, Juan Manuel Tebes interprets the biblical polemics against Edom from the perspective of "stab-in-the-back" myths (*Dolchstoßlegende*) that emerged in Germany after 1918. According to this scapegoating notion, culpability for military defeat is assigned to others, such as "Bolshevist Jews," who were accused of acts of double-crossing and betrayal. According to Tebes, "Someone had to be responsible for [Judah's] terrible defeat. As in similar post-war defeated societies, minority groups inside the society, such as members of other ethnic communities or followers of different religions, were singled out as the cause of the national downfall. Late Iron Age Judah housed several foreign peoples, but only one upon whom could be placed the burden of guilt: the Edomites."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> For an accessible account of this dramatic history, see Itzhaq Beit-Arieh, "Edomites Advance into Judah: Israelite Defensive Fortresses Inadequate," *Biblical Archaeological Review*, 22 (1996), 28–36.

<sup>12</sup> See Jer. 40:11, which appears to have been secondarily prefaced to the statement in 40:12. On Edom at the time Judah's defeat, see Jason Dykehouse, "Biblical Evidence from Obadiah and Psalm 137 for an Edomite Treaty Betrayal of Judah in the Sixth Century BCE," *Antiguo Oriente*, 11 (2013), 75–128.

<sup>13</sup> Juan Manuel Tebes, "The Edomite Involvement in the Destruction of the First Temple: A Case of Stab-in-the-Back Tradition?," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 36 (2011), 219–255, at 247. See also Tebes, "La memoria colectiva judía sobre Edom y su rol en la formación de la identidad nacional judía en la antigüedad," *Antiguo Oriente*, 14 (2016), 65–98; Tebes, "Memories of Humiliation: Cultures of Resentment Towards Edom and the Formation of Ancient Jewish National Identity," *Nations and Nationalism*, 25 (2017), 124–145.

While this scapegoating interpretation is certainly suggestive, there's a problem with it: none of the biblical texts claim that Judah *lost* the war with Babylon *because* Edom betrayed them. Making the marginalized Other responsible for one's own defeat is essential to the stab-in-the-back notion, and that's simply not the case in the biblical memories of Edom. In constructing these memories, scribes were engaging in a form of war commemoration on display throughout the biblical corpus. (Thus, as we saw in Chapter 1, a series of Pentateuchal passages cast aspersions on Israel's neighbors by fabricating memories of their aggression during their first encounters.) Though undeniably political and polemical, the memories of Edom do not engage in scapegoating.

Indeed, what's really remarkable is the consistency with which biblical narratives, prophecies, laments, etc. assign culpability to their *own* communities. By interpreting defeat as divine punishment for the nation's wrongdoing, these texts make the trauma of imperial subjugation the springboard for inventing a new form of peoplehood capable of withstanding the loss of their political sovereignty.<sup>14</sup>

While taking umbrage at the failure of their kin to display brotherly love at vulnerable moments in the nation's history, the biblical scribes refrained from making the Edomites responsible for their defeat. In contrast to the strategy adopted by many German intellectuals after 1918, these scribes did not nurture a new national identity with claims that things would have turned out much differently were it not for a minority in their midst. While they malign the memory of the Edomites, they also hold their polemics in check: "Do not abhor the Edomite, for he is your brother."

#### JUDEAN IRREDENTISM

Their pain, our gain. Though most likely exaggerated in biblical texts, the Edomite reaction to Judah's downfall in 587 BCE would have been positive (just as Judah was likely jubilant after Israel's downfall in 722 BCE). What prompted Edom's elation was less a deep-seated enmity between the two peoples than the prospect of territorial aggrandizement:

On the origins of the *Dolchstoßlegende*, see Alan Arkush's critical review of *A Deadly Legacy: German Jews and the Great War*, by Tim Grady, *Jewish Review of Books*, Winter 2019.

<sup>14</sup> See Wright, "Commemoration of Defeat." I flesh out the ideas expressed in that essay in my forthcoming book with Cambridge University Press.

the collapse of Judah's kingdom under Babylonian domination permitted Edomite encroachment on ancestral Judean lands.

Edom's territorial expansion provoked an "irredentist" posture in many Judean circles. (The term originated among the nineteenth-century Italian *irredentista* who sought to "redeem" to their homeland all Italian-speaking districts under Austro-Hungarian rule.) Thus, the punishment Obadiah envisions for Edom's war crimes is forfeiture of their territories to the exiles who live there. The "House of Jacob will take possession of those who dispossessed them," and these territories are referred to as "the towns of the Negeb" and "Mount Esau" (Obad. vv. 17–20). The same irredentist perspective informs the book of 1 Esdras (an alternative version of Ezra-Nehemiah from the late Hellenistic period). In this history, the Persian king Darius decrees that "the Idumeans [Edomites] are to give up the villages of the Jews that they held," after he had just been reminded of his vow to rebuild Jerusalem and its temple that "the Edomites burned when Judah was laid waste by the Chaldeans" (1 Esd. 4:45, 50).<sup>15</sup>

The epigraphic record from both pre-exilic times and the Persian-Hellenistic period reflects conditions of Edomites moving into the Negeb and northward, settling in what had been part of southern Judah. The territory came to be known as "Idumea." Just as Edomites/Idumeans were integrated into Judean society (as reflected in the figure of Doeg from the book of Samuel), many Judeans lived in Idumea.<sup>16</sup> For the late fifth and especially the fourth century BCE, we have almost two thousand Aramaic ostraca (short texts inscribed on pottery shards) from this region, which attest to generally harmonious relations, if not a symbiosis, between these populations. Even so, the memory of Judah's past sovereignty in the region would have endured, feeding irredentist longings and provoking the kind of accusatory salvos that we find in our biblical texts.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The oracles in Jeremiah 49 express a similar irredentist perspective in relation to the Ammonites, who are said to have seized territories from the tribe of Gad in the Transjordan; the immediately following section addresses the fate of Edom.

<sup>16</sup> A register from Ezra-Nehemiah, dating probably to the Hellenistic period, asserts that "some Judeans lived in Kiriath-Arba and its villages" (Neh. 11:25). The author likely intended to use an antiquated name for Hebron in what is a nostalgic description of Judah's borders; see Jacob L. Wright and Zev Farber, "Kiryat-Arba is Hebron ...? But is it?," TheTorah.com website, <https://thetorah.com/kiryat-arba-is-hebron-but-is-it/> [2016].

<sup>17</sup> See Bezalel Porten and Ada Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Ostraca from Idumea*, 3 vols. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2014–2018); Israel Stern, "The Population of Persian-Period Idumea According to the Ostraca: A Study of Ethnic Boundaries and



Although these texts refer to the Edomites' behavior during the destruction of Judah by the Babylonians, many were written in the Persian and Hellenistic periods, when anti-Edomite animus escalated. (Thus, the book of Judith, which is clearly a Hellenistic work, tells how the Edomites formed an alliance with other peoples in the Levant against the Israelites and betrayed them to their enemies.<sup>18</sup>) In the second century BCE, the irredentist aspirations were realized: as Judah began to regain its native military strength, the Maccabees undertook campaigns against "the descendants of Esau" and reconquered what had become Idumean territories.<sup>19</sup>

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR THE DOCUMENTARY HYPOTHESIS

Our survey of biblical texts related to the Edomites has direct implications for theories of the Pentateuch's formation. It seems highly improbable that one and the same source would have told about the happy reunion between Jacob and Esau (Gen. 32–33) and then later depicted the Edomites taking up arms against Israel when they requested passage through their lands (Num. 20). It wouldn't be surprising if one massive and complex work like the Pentateuch has competing views. We naturally assume that it, like any other ancient saga, is the product of a plurality of authors and incorporates earlier sources with discordant attitudes and conflicting perspectives. Yet what is less disturbing in a complex work like the Pentateuch becomes much more conspicuous and irritating when two texts with very different attitudes, as in the case of Genesis 32–33, and Numbers 20, are assigned to a single shorter document (such as the "Elohists").

Many contemporary defenders of the Documentary Hypothesis are especially emphatic about the *independence* of the older sources, insisting that their authors were not familiar with each other's work.<sup>20</sup> One might

Ethnogenesis" in Yigal Levin (ed.), *A Time of Change: Judah and Its Neighbours in the Persian and Early Hellenistic Periods* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 205–239.

<sup>18</sup> Jth. 7:8–22; cf. the coalitions in Neh. 4:1–3 and Ps. 83:6–9; notice that Esau marries a woman named "Judith" in Gen. 26:34.

<sup>19</sup> Aryeh Kasher, *Jews, Idumaeans, and Ancient Arabs* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1988). Reported in 1 Macc. 4–6; 2 Macc. 10–12. Josephus describes Upper Idumea in terms of the following towns: Hebron (*Ant.* XII–XIII. 12.8.6; *Wars* 4.9.7), Halhul (*Wars* 4.9.6), Bethsura (*Ant.* 12.9.4), Marissa (*Ant.* 13.9.1; *Wars* 1.2.5), Dura (*Ant.* 13.9.1; *Wars* 1.2.5), Caphethra (*Wars* 4.9.9), Bethlethephon (*Wars* 4.8.1), and Tekoa (*Wars* 4.9.5).

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., Baruch Schwartz, "How the Compiler of the Pentateuch Worked: The Composition of Genesis 37" in Evans, Lohr, and Petersen, *Book of Genesis*, 263–278.

then attempt to attribute Genesis 32–33, to one source and Numbers 20, to a different one. Yet it beggars belief to suppose that the accounts emerged in isolation from each other, as they bear many marks of cross-pollination: Both are about a voyage of Jacob/Israel to their homeland. Both present the protagonists (Moses and Jacob) sending messages to the other party, recounting events after an earlier point of separation (Jacob's departure from his family; Israel's sojourn in Egypt). Both Esau and the Edomite king come out against Jacob/Israel with troops prepared to inflict injury. Yet Esau, in contrast to the Edomite king, eventually offers to assign his warriors to guard Jacob's clan until they arrive at their destination.

If these texts are ascribed to the same document, one might attempt to understand them as being etiological, reporting that the ancestors of Israel and Edom once got along but that their descendants were inclined to cross swords. The problem with this solution is that it fails to take seriously the various and profound ways in which Genesis differs from the narrative in Exodus-Joshua: Genesis offers a *modus vivendi* with outsiders, and it depicts Egypt extending generous hospitality to Jacob's family when they migrate as refugees from famine-stricken Canaan. In glaring contrast to Genesis, the narrative in Exodus-Joshua begins with Egypt pursuing a program of genocide against Israel. The same antipathy characterizes relations between Israel and most other peoples in these books. Time and again, the nation is forbidden to enter into treaties with Canaan's inhabitants; it is to give them no quarter as it takes possession of their land. Genesis articulates both a vision of, and concrete strategies for, peaceful coexistence that couldn't be more at odds with the general animus toward outsiders in Exodus-Joshua.<sup>21</sup>

#### CONTESTING MEMORIES

The tale of Jacob's rapprochement with Esau is a complex account with an ideological agenda. Symbolically, it treats Israel's relations with the Other, personified in the patriarch's twin brother. Yet it also relates to a particular population. If Esau and Jacob could "kiss and make up" after years of enmity, then a future reconciliation with Edom is possible. Numbers 20, on the other hand, rejects this conciliatory stance with a counter-memory in which the Edomites fail to display fraternal

<sup>21</sup> See the classic work on this compositional chasm: Konrad Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story: Israel's Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2010).

solicitude. Their behavior at a critical moment in Israel's history – and their failure to comply with standard conventions of wartime – justifies belligerence toward them in the present, in keeping with the rationale treated in Chapter 1 under the rubric “War Memories as *Casus Belli*.”<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps some scholars will persist in the effort to press these rival memories into the confines of a single source or demonstrate that they belong to different sources that were drafted without any knowledge of each other. But such endeavors prove to be misguided when confronted with the abundance and heterogeneity of the texts related to the Edomites' wartime conduct throughout Israel's history, as well as the many analogous war memories for other neighbors examined in this book.

A more tenable approach takes seriously the extent to which texts gradually accumulate layers of editorial accretions, reflecting the perspectives and concerns of different times and places.<sup>23</sup> Thus, it seems likely that the portion of the account in Numbers 20 that overlaps with Genesis 32–33, telling how, after sojourning in a foreign land, the Edomites' kin are now voyaging back to their homeland (Num. 20:14b–16, 18–19), represents a late scribal supplement. If so, the account of the Israelites' petition to the Edomite king would provide a perfect form-critical parallel to the petition they make to Sihon in the following chapter (Num. 21:21–23).

Though it's much less tidy, this mode of supplementation reflects more faithfully the often contradictory and cluttered character of demotic war commemoration and other decentralized forms of social discourse. Such

<sup>22</sup> The Masoretic text has *puncta extraordinaria* over the Hebrew word for “kiss” in Genesis 33:4, and the rabbinic interpretation of this word reflects the contest of memories that we've studied in Part I. While some rabbinic interpreters claimed that Esau's embrace was authentic and heartfelt, others maintained that the text describes not a fraternal *kiss* (נשק) but a vengeful *bite* (נשנ). The second, harmonistic option is in keeping with the documentary approach that ascribes both Genesis 33 and Numbers 20 to the same source. On the rabbinic interpretations, see Albert I. Baumgarten, “Why Is Esau's Kiss Dotted?,” TheTorah.com website, [www.thetorah.com/article/why-is-esaus-kiss-dotted](http://www.thetorah.com/article/why-is-esaus-kiss-dotted) [2018].

<sup>23</sup> In all fairness, it should be noted that recent proponents of the documentary approach allow for and theorize this polyphony, albeit reducing it to one compiler and four completely independent sources. Thus, Baruch Schwartz contends that “the compiler” treated these sources as already holy and thus unalterable: “What is certain is that by taking upon himself, along with the task of merging the source documents into a single continuous text, the maximal preservation of the documents in their given form, the compiler of the Torah demonstrated that he attached far greater importance to the verbal inviolability of the sources than he attached to the plausibility, consistency of content and exegetical clarity of the final product” (Baruch, “Compiler,” 274). For more on this point, see Chapter 4, n. 11.

contestation of memories is well attested in contexts where cultural-political expressions are not monopolized by a single power. While examples abound in modernity, in antiquity we can witness a “war of memories” not only in the biblical corpus but also in the ancient Aegean world, whose competing states vied for status, membership, and honor in a larger political community. What’s remarkable about biblical war commemoration is that while it, too, presupposes a political community larger than its two member states (Israel and Judah), it flourishes among anonymous scribes in the period following the *downfall* of these states (in 722 BCE and 587 BCE, respectively).<sup>24</sup>

We don’t know much about the social location of these scribes, but three facts are indisputable: 1) there were many of them; 2) they often did not share the same perspective; and 3) they created a corpus of texts that palpably, even if only partially, preserves their plurality.

<sup>24</sup> For an illustration of this “war of memories” from the ancient Aegean world, see the Conclusions to this volume.