JENNA KEMP

Forgetting to Remember

Mohr Siebeck

Forschungen zum Alten Testament

Edited by

Corinna Körting (Hamburg) · Konrad Schmid (Zürich)
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Forgetting to Remember

Cultural Memory, Intertextuality, and Scribal Agency
in the Hebrew Bible

Mohr Siebeck

Jenna Kemp, born 1987; 2011–2014 MA (Biblical Studies, Graduate Theological Union); 2014–2021 PhD (Hebrew Bible, UC Berkeley); 2021–2024 Postdoc (University of Basel); lecturer at UC Berkeley.
orcid.org/0000-0002-7149-8921

This book is dedicated to my sunshine kid, Rafael

שכוח, זכור, שכוח
פתוח, סגור, פתוח

Forgotten, remembered, forgotten
Open, closed, open

– Yehuda Amichai, *Open Closed Open*

Preface

This book is a significant revision of my UC Berkeley dissertation. As such, the person to whom I owe the most thanks is my advisor, Ron Hendel, who has encouraged my interests since day one (and continues to do so). He has always pushed me to think in more nuanced ways and has taught me the joys of puzzling and play. In addition, Chana Kronfeld and Robert Alter were both committee members who taught me to take the scribes as creators of literary beauty very seriously. Ann Swidler directed my learning on the sociology of culture and taught me to think of cultural memory in an embodied way – culture as use. I am grateful for these teachers and mentors who helped me craft my thinking. And I am grateful to my cohort of Hebrew literature students at Cal for reading my work and expanding my horizons, most particularly Oren Yirmiya and Madeline Wyse, as well as my East Coast counterpart, Carolyn Klaasen, all of whom read multiple disorganized drafts and have been invaluable conversation partners.

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As the project underwent revisions, I need to note a very special thanks to my team at Universität Basel conducting the project "Transforming Memories of Collective Violence in the Hebrew Bible," of which I have been honored to be a part: Sonja Ammann, our fearless leader, who mentored me through the weird and often invisible transition from student to professional, Stephen Germany, Anita Dirnberger, Helge Bezold, and Julia Rhyder, who encouraged me to apply to this transatlantic position in the first place. Being in ongoing conversation with these colleagues has helped me sharpen every single part of this study, shifting this project from a dissertation into a book. My thanks to the Swiss

   All translations from the Hebrew Bible are my own, unless otherwise stated. All New Testament translations are from the NRSV.

Berkeley, April 2025   Jenna Kemp

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Introduction

Oblivion is the life force of memory and remembrance is its product.

– Marc Augé, *Oblivion*

A Jewish scribal tradition holds that that to test a new quill, a scribe should write the name of Amalek and then cross it out.[1] This tradition emerges from the command in Deuteronomy 25:17–19 to "remember what Amalek did to you on the road when you came out of Egypt […]. Wipe out the memory of Amalek from under the heavens. Do not forget!" This command – to remember to forget, and not just to forget but to obliterate memory – is striking. How can we erase the memory of the Amalekites if we have to remember what they did? How do we forget a thing that is embedded in the daily prayer? Is it not the case that remembering to eradicate the memory of Amalek only preserves the memory of Amalek? This line of questioning, so natural to our own modes of thinking, emerges from a view of memory that paints remembering as fullness and forgetting as loss. This book, like Moses's command, is an attempt to complicate this view.

The question that animates this book has to do with the dynamics of remembering and forgetting. The study began with the observation that what we call the "biblical canon" contains a multiplicity of diverse perspectives, not all of which cohere with one another. Even so, it strikes me as worth noticing that readers, as well as the traditions in which they are embedded, still make coherent meaning out of these texts, but this must often involve theological syntheses that some of the texts blatantly contradict. For example, I had a professor in graduate school who made a statement like, "the Bible condemns the use of the 'high places' (במות) where people worshiped Baal." This was interesting to me because of course *parts* of the Bible condemn the high places and situate them as foreign, notably Deuteronomy and texts that were influenced by or resemble it. Yet other parts of the Bible treat the high places as normal and situate Israelite worship of

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[1] The epigraph is from Marc Augé, *Oblivion*, trans. Marjolijn de Jager (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 21; trans. of *Les formes de l'oubli* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 1998).

Yahweh at these sites. In order to say something like "the high places are bad," then, it seems that one must forget other perspectives and think in the terms that the Deuteronomist has provided. To make meaning out of the diverse set of texts that constitutes the Hebrew Bible requires at least temporarily forgetting some of it and remembering other parts, prioritizing them as the lens through which we choose to read.

To explore this problem as a biblicist, it seemed only natural to turn back to the composite nature of the text and think about what created the phenomenon of multivocality in the first place – that is, to study the process of the formation of the biblical text as a way to explore how readers create these syntheses. The questions are these: How do scribes remember the literature within their culture? In their act of remembering, how do they change how it can be remembered in the future? How do they remember, and how do they forget? How do they create possibilities for both remembering and forgetting for future readers and tradition at large? This book is an exploration of these questions, and in it, I theorize that secondary scribal activity involves acts of cultural memory and argue that the formation of Hebrew Bible reflects a process of cultural memory, a process that is always shot through with forgetting. The result of the study is a claim that forgetting is central to creating the syntheses necessary for remembrance. To remember, we must forget, which leads us back to Amalek and to a brief introduction to how we tend to think about remembering, forgetting, and cultural memory more broadly.

1. Cultural Memory

There is an alternative view of the command not to forget to remember Amalek, to obliterate its memory. Moses's command speaks to the dynamics of cultural memory and the transtemporal travel of cultural meaning along memory paths. Its presence corollary to the Jewish morning prayers speaks to the act of remembering (or repetition) as the mode by which memory continues to exist and to the diachronic maintenance of discourse as it emerges over time. In other words, this memory exists because people keep using it and imbuing it with meaning; they activate Amalek continually in the desired context so that it is organized correctly within the discourse. Amalek has to keep being remembered in the Jewish tradition, but only in the right way. The command to remember to wipe out the memory of Amalek also hints to us that forgetting is not necessarily the same thing as oblivion. One function of forgetting is the arrangement and (re)organization of the elements of memory. To remember to forget Amalek is to continue to put Amalek in the correct place in discourse. Amalek's memory must continue to be wiped out, so we must remember to keep forgetting. If Amalek falls out of use and we forget to keep forgetting, there is a chance that Amalek

might be remembered – might emerge from oblivion – in the wrong place. Forgetting Amalek is about maintaining its memory. Forgetting, I argue, is integral to memory.

This perspective is in line with Jan Assmann's contention that cultural memory is "the handing down of meaning."[2] For meaning to be handed down, agents of memory activate and communicate things of cultural relevance that have emerged from the past. In so doing, they communicate a discursive organization of these relevant cultural products – they tell people what they mean. Agents put cultural products into contact with recent events, emerging social structures, or other products that also emerge from the past. The command to remember to forget invites us toward a different way of thinking about remembering and forgetting that is less about what Ann Rigney calls "original plentitude and subsequent loss" and more about how discursive structures are maintained and how they shift over time.[3] Or, as Jeffrey Olick states, cultural memory should be "understood in its own terms as discourse, rather than only as product or indicator."[4] In this mode of thinking, remembering is about continuity and making things present over time, while forgetting is oriented toward elements of change.

Cultural memory is not a thing that cultures have but a theory that accounts for the continual existence of culture over time, a phenomenon that is so foundational to our lives, our identities, and our ability to make meaning that it is often overlooked. Rather, this phenomenon cries out for explanation. How is it that the elements of culture exist from one moment to the next? How is it that we know what they mean and how to use them? Theory of cultural memory sensitizes us to these questions and provides a framework in which we can understand "communication across the abyss of time," a phenomenon that is about the formation and handing down of meaning.[5] The construction of meaning, though, requires forgetting. Forgetting is what allows multiplicities to converge and syntheses to emerge into symbols – or, in the lexicon developed by Pierre Nora, "sites of memory" – that are *memorable* because they provide meaning.[6] There is no memory without meaning, there is no meaning without synthesis, and there is no synthesis without forgetting.

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[2] Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 6.

[3] Ann Rigney, "Plenitude, Scarcity and the Circulation of Cultural Memory," *Journal of European Studies* 35, no. 1 (2005): 11–14.

[4] Jeffrey K. Olick, *The Sins of the Fathers: Germany, Memory, Method* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 463.

[5] Aleida Assmann, "Canon and Archive," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 97.

[6] Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire*, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1984). English translation: *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, 3 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

This intertwined relationship between remembering, forgetting, synthesis, and the construction of meaning in processes of cultural memory is nicely illustrated in Andrea Bieler's work on monuments of historical trauma and the related political negotiations of memory that ensue. In her discussion of a memorial in Argentina designed to remember human rights abuses under the dictatorial government, Bieler notes the resistance to its installment by those who "were concerned that an official memorial site would create a kind of closure and that such institutionalised memory would brush over the still unresolved murder cases." Memorial sites, she states, can "paradoxically create amnesia instead of historic attentiveness, political alertness, and productive restlessness."[7] Although modern memorial spaces and biblical texts are far away from each other, her work highlights the fact that synthesizing past events into an official narrative (or in her case, literal site) actually means that those elements that do not fit into the synthesis required for narrativization or symbolic representation may fall to the wayside; they might become backgrounded or even eliminated in the continued understanding of what the past means. As readers or visitors take in the cultural product, they are met with the consolidation of meaning into a monument rather than the elements of the past that would fall outside of this synthesis. This is how we can say something like "the Bible condemns the high places." The parts of the Bible that condemn them have been synthesized and emerged as the official "site of memory," and any other instance where they are normalized must either be forgotten or read in terms of this synthesis.

When we are considering synthesis, we must also consider the element of time. One of the seeds of what I have laid out in this book comes from interacting with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of time. While I do not claim expertise in this complex philosophical tradition, reading his work prompted me to think about cultural memory a bit differently than the field of biblical studies tends to. Merleau-Ponty theorizes the experience of time as perceptible according to an individual's "field of presence," by which he means our awareness of the times both before and after our present moment.[8] Time, he states, is not an experience in which I "pass through a series of instances of now, the images of which I preserve and which, placed end to end, make a line." The experience of time, in other words, is not linear. Rather "with the arrival of every moment, its predecessor undergoes a change."[9] A person's perception of their past changes as they come into each new present.

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[7] Andrea Bieler, "Monuments of Historical Trauma as Sites of Artistic Expression, Emotional Processing and Political Negotiation," in *Post-Conflict Hauntings: Transforming Memories of Historical Trauma*, ed. Kim Wale, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, and Jeffrey Prager, Palgrave Studies in Compromise after Conflict (Springer, 2020), 346.

[8] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Temporality,' from *The Phenomenology of Perception*," in *Time*, ed. Jonathan Westphal and Carl Levenson, Readings in Philosophy (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 182.

[9] Merleau-Ponty, "Maurice Merleau-Ponty," 183.

Merleau-Ponty goes on to articulate that as we progress through moments A, B, C, and D, we perceive A differently over time. We think of A at moment B not exactly as A, but as A in the context of moment B (i.e., A′). At C, we remember A by how it was at B (A″). Then at D, we remember A as we remembered it at C, but we access that version also through moment B (A‴), and so on. "What is given to me," he states, "is A transparently visible through A′, then the two through A″, and so on, as I see a pebble through the mass of water which moves over it."[10] His view of time speaks to the forward movement of the memory of the past through time, but at the same time of a rememberer's agency to perceive the past and repeat it anew, thereby changing the potentials for how the past can be perceived in the future.[11] The agent of memory interacts with the version of the past they were given, which itself will be an accumulation of versions of that past over periods of time. They, in turn, hand on the past as a changed entity to future agents of memory.

This theory can speak to the phenomenon of the biblical text. We have inherited the oldest biblical texts through the framing, reframing, addition, and canonical boundaries that have collected over time, and each person – each scribal agent, as I will call them – who worked with these texts received them in this way. As each act of addition is simultaneously an act of reception, each scribal agent has left the text changed so that each subsequent reader can read A only through A′ and so on. We can only understand the past, or cultural products emerging from the past, through the ways in which it has (or they have) been activated over time. We have no direct access. In the same way, we have no direct access to the moment of cultural production and what an author meant or intended. But we do have access to what their text did – or, rather, *what people did with it* over time and how those acts have accumulated onto the text itself.

In this book, I focus on processes of cultural memory and on how the theory of cultural memory accounts for the formation and survival of cultural products and their meanings over time. I will spell this theory out in more detail in my first chapter and refine it toward a dialectic with the biblical text.

2. Method and Structure

The method I use throughout this book is eclectic. It blends philological approaches that are traditional in biblical studies with theoretical approaches to cultural memory, intertextuality, and literary culture. In many ways, it returns to the redactional activity that scholars have noticed and argued over since the foundation of our field. Composition criticism emerged from a Romantic

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[10] Merleau-Ponty, "Maurice Merleau-Ponty," 185.
[11] I want to be explicit that agency is not the same thing as intention.

longing for originality and authenticity that we may no longer share, but we can still attend to the historical formation of the text from fresh perspectives, paying attention to the agency of scribes as they add, edit, or redact material.[12] I view these scribal efforts as agentive acts of maintaining the culturally important works within their discourse. The Bible is formed as these scribes remember, their acts of memory detectable by us as we recognize their literary interventions into these texts.

The reader may notice that while I am discussing something rather conventional (composition and redaction), I sometimes use a different lexicon than is typical in biblical studies. I do this because I am using concepts and theories from cultural memory theory in order not just to label composition and sort out the layers (which was and often continues to be the primary goal of composition criticism), but to theorize the phenomenon in terms of cultural memory processes. My hope is to advance how biblical studies thinks about cultural memory and, simultaneously, to make my theory comprehensible to other scholars in memory studies.

I begin with a chapter focused on theory of cultural memory as well as its use in biblical studies. In Chapter One, I outline how I approach the idea of cultural memory in this book, and I situate scribal activities as acts of cultural memory performed by individual agents. Scribes inherit texts with a range of potential meanings, make literary interventions in these texts, and pass on these cultural products with a new range of potentials for meaning. In this way, they mediate the memory of the textual tradition, and they are individual agents responsible for the process of cultural memory that resulted in the formation of what we will come to call the Hebrew Bible. The individual scribes that I describe in this book are theoretically constructed. We do not have evidence of their individual existence; we do not know who they were, or if they were one, two, or a larger group. What we do have is our ability to detect tensions in the text that rise to such a level that positing the work of an additional scribe is the simplest solution to the tensions. We can detect the presence of scribal activity, and in this book, I theorize this activity in terms of cultural memory.

The three case studies that make up the remaining three chapters each address this idea in a way that emerges from the interaction of cultural memory theory with the selected texts. In this way, I am theorizing from the text rather than applying theory to the text. Each of my case studies requires a slightly different combination of tools, but all will follow a similar procedure. I will first offer a brief discussion of the compositional history of the case study; some of this work

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[12] On the Romantic origins of composition criticism, see Yosefa Raz, "Jeremiah before the Womb: On Fathers, Sons, and the Telos of Redaction," in *Prophecy and Power: Jeremiah in a Feminist and Postcolonial Perspective*, ed. Carolyn Sharp and Christl M. Maier (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 86–100.

I have published elsewhere, and some of it I engage in more detail here. I do this to establish the boundaries of the literary intervention(s) (i.e., an insertion) that will be the object of my focus. Within each case study, I give the theoretical scribe responsible for the intervention a name and a pronoun in order to give personhood and agency to the human figures producing these texts and mediating the cultural products they have inherited. I refer to each scribe using the third masculine singular pronoun rather tentatively, simply because the sociohistorical reality makes it likely that the scribes were men. Next, I analyze the literary intervention using theories from cultural memory as well as literary studies in order to make a claim concerning how the scribal agent remembered the earlier text and what changes he made to it. I will then theorize how those changes can be analyzed under the rubric of "forgetting," how the scribe created the potential that elements in the meaning of the text would be forgotten, and how that which is forgotten allows for the formation of "sites of memory." I describe these sites of memory as "extratextual" in the sense that they reflect hermeneutical assumptions that become available via the scribe's literary intervention for later readers who approach the text. Each case study offers a facet of forgetting – a way to look at the phenomenon – and together they situate forgetting as a complex part of the dynamic process of cultural memory.

The three texts that I selected to make up this study are from three of the major literary genres and collections that make up the Hebrew Bible: Exodus 34:11–17 (law / Pentateuch), Isaiah 2 (poetry / latter prophets), and 1 Samuel 13–15 (narrative / Deuteronomistic History). On their surface, these texts may not have all that much in common, but I selected them in part because of three differences: each exemplifies a different kind of literary intervention, each reflects the consolidation of a different extratextual site of memory, and each is fundamentally formative for traditions that extend from the Bible (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). Similarity of theme also plays an important role. Each of these case studies deals with questions of cult, proper worship, and the divine retribution that might follow transgressions in these realms. In that sense, they all are a part of the larger interest in proper religious practice and the related implications for the fate of the people. Choosing these as case studies therefore allows us to have some insight into how agents within scribal culture are placing their history together with their experience, as well as into how a religious textual tradition changes, grows, and expands its content while simultaneously consolidating some aspects of its meaning over time. These case studies provide insight into the reorganization of meaning inherent in the act of collecting texts.

In Chapter Two, I analyze Exodus 34:11–17 (a late insertion into the Pentateuch that continues through vv. 18–26). I argue that the author of this literary intervention consolidates different bans on various ritual objects that were functionally and / or legally separate in the older law collections, narrativizing their use with the "whoring" metaphor that resembles prophetic discourse. The

author remembers the legal codes and the prophets but reads them in terms of one another, which reflects an understanding that the various texts are conceptually connected. The synthesis of texts requires that scribes do not make use of the incoherences between texts, introducing the potential that their particularities are forgotten. In this chapter, I argue that forgetting is productive as scribes create and maintain the links among texts that ultimately result in the canon as a site of memory.

In this study, I organize remembering and forgetting in terms of *selection* and *deselection* and the potentials for meaning that are shifted by new intertextual contact. An agent selects a variety of cultural products in a single context, putting them into a new organization in which they create meaning in a dialectic with one another. Elements of each of the independent texts that are deselected do not continue to be productive for meaning-making and are therefore potentially forgotten. We should not think that the scribe forgot to offer continuity for all elements of the texts; rather, the intertextual contact between texts introduces new potential meanings into the reading tradition that cannot take earlier organizations into account in the same way. The deselected elements that are necessary for synthesis may therefore not continue to signify and may thus be forgotten.

In Chapter Three, I approach Isaiah 2, which is composed of two main sections (vv. 2–4 [5]. 6–21). I spend time primarily on the latter, looking at how a scribal agent reframed an earlier day of Yahweh poem. By analyzing issues of metaphor and temporality, I argue that the scribe reshapes the temporality of the old poem from one situated in a poetic present to one organized according to linear cause and effect. The scribe sets this linear temporality in terms of a Deuteronomistic view of history and the role of idolatry in Judah's exile. The result is that Isaiah as the assumed author is understood to be able to see into futures distant from himself. The further addition of the vision of the "end of days" (vv. 2–4 [5]) extends this future indefinitely, thus exponentially extending Isaiah's ability to predict, even to the end of days. Readers at any point in history can therefore understand Isaiah to have been predicting their own present (or relatively close future); this understanding keeps extending Isaiah's temporal sight and reinscribing the cultural significance of both the scroll of Isaiah and the figure of Isaiah of Jerusalem. The scroll and the figure thus have a dialogical relationship in which the figure propels the significance of the scroll forward in time, and the continued reading tradition of the scroll reinscribes the significance of the figure. Isaiah the seer and Isaiah the scroll emerge together as sites of memory.

Also in Chapter Three, I move from the acts of selecting and deselecting to the implications of these acts for the organization of cultural products. I organize remembering and forgetting according to movement and position within a *field* of memory. While I thought about deselection under the umbrella of forgetting in Chapter Two, here I add under this umbrella the principle of *backgrounding*.

As the figure and text of Isaiah move forward in time, the fact of his eighth-century context is foregrounded, but the contextual meanings of his work in that century recede into the background. As the Isaiah text travels over time, the meanings and referents of his predictions change with each reader, and what the text meant in the eighth century moves into the background. It is precisely the deselection of these meanings that gives Isaiah the seer and Isaiah the scroll longevity as sites of memory.

In Chapter Four, the third and final case study, I examine 1 Samuel 13–15 and the two rejections of King Saul, which have long been recognized as insertions into an earlier form of the text that narrates the battles of Saul and Jonathan with the Philistines at Michmash. In the earlier form of the story, Saul is a near-tragic but pious figure who adheres to good Yahwistic battle and sacrificial practices, but whose efforts are consistently foiled by his son Jonathan's independent actions. Saul's lack of success creates ambiguity as to the divine assessment of Saul. Jonathan's actions drive the narrative, but the ironic result is that Jonathan's very life is put in jeopardy by the inability of Saul and Jonathan to act in tandem. The secondary rejections of Saul highlight Saul's associations with battle rituals and sacrifice but shift these associations into the very reason for Saul's rejection from the throne, thereby offering a resolution to the ambiguous assessment of Saul for future readers. This scribal intervention places both continuity within the Saul tradition and change to it in the same location, giving continuity to elements associated with Saul but reorganizing their meaning so that they function as the very reason that Saul is rejected and clear the way for a divinely ordained rise of David. The divine rejection of Saul therefore creates divine history as a site of memory in which human events are organized according to cause and effect, but within which the divine intervenes to create his intended outcome.

To think about how Saul is remembered by this scribal agent, I introduce the classical art of mnemotechnics and the emplacement of elements to be remembered. I argue that an agent of memory constructs a compelling version of a figure of memory by moving around elements already associated with that figure. Even as the Rejection Scribe aids in the continuity of elements associated with Saul, he creates the potential that the complex and ambiguous portrait of a pious Saul is forgotten. Moving associations of a remembered figure around overwrites and silences Saul's bumbling piety, which causes the piety to be forgotten in favor of a rejected Saul.

In the Conclusion, I turn toward theorizing textual tradition with the portraits of forgetting that I painted in the three case studies. These portraits emerge from a view of cultural memory oriented toward the activation of elements in discourse and the locations of and connections among these elements. This discourse is transtemporal, and it creates a transtemporal collaboration between agents occupying different historical moments. Each agent mediates potentials and introduces discontinuities and, along with them, the potential that the tradition at

large forgets elements that agents do not bring forward in time. To think about these issues, I will look at later reception of both these textual foci and the sites of memory I show within them.

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