

Innovation in Persian Period Judah

Edited by
JILL MIDDLEMAS

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Mohr Siebeck

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Innovation in Persian Period Judah

Royal and Temple Ideology
in its Ancient Near East Setting

edited by

Jill Middlemas

Mohr Siebeck

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In fond memory of
Gary Neil Knoppers
(1958–2018)

– for his contribution to the full breadth and depth of Old Testament studies as well as in grateful remembrance of his support for and cooperation with colleagues and students near and far. His light dimmed far too soon, but his life and legacy will be a blessing for the future.

O LORD, my God, I cried out to you and you healed me,
O LORD, you brought me up from Sheol,
you preserved my life from going down into the pit.
(Ps. 30:3–4)

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Introduction: The Restoration of the King and Temple in Persian Period Yehud

JILL MIDDLEMAS

Biblical scholars tend to regard the bulk of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament (hereafter OT) as the product of the Persian period which stretched from the overthrow of the Babylonian empire in 539 to the end of Achaemenid rule in ca. 330 BCE effectuated by Alexander the Great. The association of the OT, including the origination and redaction of inherited traditions, with Persian rule leaves a number of questions about whether, how, and to what extent Persian influence was exerted on Yehud, the former southern kingdom of Judah, and the Jerusalem elites responsible for its written records. The present volume arose from a series of discussions that took place as part of the Persian period seminar at the Society of Biblical Literature meetings to address exactly these questions by attending to thought about the king and the temple in comparative perspective. The two themes of king and temple intersect and diverge as points of interest partly because of early initiatives by the Persian kings at empire building and maintenance, but also because of the historical record of Yehud during the entire Achaemenid period. By way of introduction, this chapter presents a brief overview of Persian imperial strategies and governance that had repercussions for the province of Yehud, a brief summary of the situation in the former kingdom of Judah in the Second Temple period, and an introduction to the essays of the volume set within consideration of the dual topoi of the king and temple.

1. Persian Rule and the Persian Period

The advent of Persian rule over the former Babylonian Empire through the military campaigns of Cyrus the Great (550–522 BCE) and the restructure of the empire under Darius I (522–486 BCE) ushered in a new era for the ancient Near East (ANE).¹ In the early Persian period, the two rulers of the Achaemenid line, Cyrus (550–530) and his son Cambyses (530–522), concentrated on con-

¹ Histories of the Persian empire include P. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (trans. P. T. Daniels; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002); E. S. Gerstenberger, *Israel in the Persian Period: The Fifth and Fourth Centuries BCE* (trans. S. S. Schatzmann; BE 8; Atlanta: SBL, 2011); M. W. Waters, *Ancient Persia: A Concise History of the Achaemenid Empire*,

solidating and expanding the empire. Generally speaking, they left the administrative apparatus and governing units in place that they had inherited from the Babylonians before them.² Cyrus and his son Cambyses put in place a series of mechanisms to foster control of a vast empire including fortification, tribute, temple construction, and propaganda. According to archaeological evidence, for example, fortification towers were constructed and rebuilt along the western periphery perhaps to secure the area against Egyptian interference in the latter part of the sixth century BCE.³ At the same time, Cyrus implemented strategies to promote the steady flow of tribute to the heartland and, perhaps more importantly given his strategic aims, to secure food and supplies for the sustenance of the imperial army. Increased settlement in the region of Diyala in this period suggests the movement of populations around the empire to further imperial and local goals of establishing long-term economic and agricultural development.⁴ Of more importance for the present volume, the first two Persian kings promoted temple restoration and building as a means to foster support and stability in volatile regions – Cyrus in Babylon and Cambyses in Egypt.

A view to comparative material shows that Persian policy allowed, supported, and even sponsored the regeneration of local communities and their important cultic centres. The most lauded piece of evidence cited to expand on Persian policies after the submission of Babylonia to the rule of Cyrus is the Cyrus Cylinder (COS 2:314–16; ANET 315–16). The Cyrus Cylinder is a cuneiform inscription related to the restoration of temple property and people on a ten-inch (roughly 25 cm) clay barrel currently housed in the British Museum. It is consistent with other statements in ancient times from kings who conquered territory and sought to quell rebellion by vilifying the defeated ruler through claims of continuity with local and national traditions and with the support of the local god.⁵

550–330 BCE (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). Cf. A. Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire: A Corpus of Sources from the Achaemenid Period* (London: Routledge, 2010).

² M. Dandamaev and V.G. Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 97. J. Middlemas, *The Troubles of Templeless Judah* (OTM; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 68–70, contains a brief overview of the transition to Persian rule and a number of additional references.

³ M. Mallowan, “Cyrus the Great (558–529 BC),” in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 392–419, here 408–9; E. Stern, “The Persian Empire and the Political and Social History of Palestine in the Persian Period,” *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, Vol. 1, *Introduction, The Persian Period* (eds. W. Davies and L. Finkelstein; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 70–87, here 86.

⁴ G.C. Cameron, “Cyrus the ‘Father’ and Babylonia,” in *Acta Iranica*. Vol. 1, *Premiere Serie: Commemoration Cyrus* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 45–48; K.G. Hoglund, *Achaemenid Imperial Administration in Syria-Palestine and the Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 3–5, 57–59; P.R. Davies, *In Search of ‘Ancient Israel’* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 79–81; O. Lipschits, “The History of the Benjamin Region under Babylonian Rule,” *TA* 26 (1999): 182–85.

⁵ The propagandistic purposes of the Cyrus Cylinder have long been recognized, but see A. Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East c. 3000–330 BC*, Vol. 2 (London: Routledge, 1995), 601–3.

... I returned to (these) sacred cities on the other side of the Tigris, the sanctuaries of which have been ruins for a long time, the images which (used) to live therein and established for them permanent sanctuaries. I (also) gathered all their (former) inhabitants and returned (to them) their habitations. Furthermore, I resettled upon the command of Marduk, the great lord, all the gods of Sumer and Akkad whom Nabonidus has brought into Babylon ... to the anger of the lord of the gods, unharmed in their (former) chapels, the places which make them happy. (ANET 315–16)

The sentiments expressed on the Cyrus Cylinder have long been used to suggest that Cyrus launched an empirewide campaign to return divine statues to their shrines of origin, restore devastated and ruined temples, and repatriate peoples forcibly deported by the Babylonians to their native homelands.

In recent years, how integral Persian imperial policies of appeasement have been in the formation of the religio-political context of Yehud has fallen under increased scrutiny, with particular questions being raised about whether Cyrus was concerned with the return of the cultic images of deities and peoples outside of Babylonia.⁶ As Rainer Albertz notes, upon closer scrutiny the communities listed on the Cyrus Cylinder include devastated or neglected areas in the border region between Babylonia and Persia. As such, they represent a more diverse area than solely within the Babylonian heartland.⁷ Notably, Cyrus sponsored temple reconstruction projects in Ur according to four extant building bricks,⁸ which is in keeping with the ideology expressed on the Cyrus Cylinder.⁹ The evidence of Cyrus' attitude towards the restoration of sanctuaries, the return of seized temple property, and the resettlement of deported peoples who identified with their native homelands suggests ideological purposes – that he “kept to a conservative policy of restoring local cults so as to reinforce the local identity of the population and increase their loyalty to the Persian crown.”¹⁰ In the early period of Persian rule, the stability and cohesion of the empire depended on the good will of local communities and local power structures.

Through comparison with the inscription of Udjahorresnet and the Elephantine papyri, for example, a clearer picture of Persian initiatives to foster stability and communal renewal emerges through attention to matters related to local

⁶ A. Kuhrt, “The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy,” *JSOT* 25 (1983): 83–97.

⁷ R. Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.* (trans. D. Green; SBL 3; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), 112–16.

⁸ Three of the building bricks explicitly mention the military leader Cyrus as the sanctuary's benefactor. A badly damaged fourth brick no longer contains the name of the lauded royal benefactor, but the depiction of the king who returned the gods to their shrines that accompanies the inscription is thought to represent Cyrus.

⁹ A.L. Oppenheim, “The Babylonian Evidence of Achaemenian Rule in Mesopotamia,” in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 2, *The Median and Achaemenian Periods* (ed. I. Gershevitch; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 529–97.

¹⁰ Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 116.

communities and their temple cults.¹¹ The statue of Udjahorresnet contains a hieroglyphic inscription that is an important source of information for the Persian kings Cambyses and Darius I. The text portrays Cambyses and his successor Darius fulfilling the functions of the Egyptian pharaohs. As such, they act in accordance with local customs and pay obeisance to the local gods. The inscription suggests that Cambyses sought to quell rebellion in Egypt by working with local leaders and communities. In this way, interpreters align his approach with that of his father, Cyrus, who similarly implemented a strategy of appeasement. Of the evidence from the statue of Udjahorresnet, Amelie Kuhrt writes:

Udjahorresnet shows that Cambyses' policy in Egypt closely follows that of Cyrus in Babylonia: forging links with local elites, installing them in honoured (though not politically powerful) positions, exploiting their familiarity with local conditions in order to make acceptance of his rule as palatable as possible and moulding himself to fit the role an Egyptian king was traditionally expected to fill – honouring the gods, authorising continued offerings, maintaining their sanctuaries in purity, adopting ceremonial Egyptian titles and names.¹²

The actions of Cambyses in Egypt mirrored those of his father Cyrus in Babylonia. Both men worked within regional administrative and religious structures to promote Persian rule. Their examples of respect for local authority are continued by Darius who was not of the Achaemenid line, but, nevertheless, ascended to the throne after the untimely death of Cambyses under mysterious circumstances.

There are traces of a policy of appeasement already in the time of the Neo-Babylonians. Although the Babylonians generally left capitals and major cities devastated and in ruins with little or no signs of reconstruction, they appeared to have made an exception for the temple in Ashur, which was reconstructed with the assistance of imperial sponsorship.¹³ The return of former inhabitants of the kingdom of Judah in the early period of the rule of Darius as part of a greater imperial policy to encourage local communities to remain loyal to the Persian government, is in line with ANE practice as evidenced in the written

¹¹ L. L. Grabbe, *Judaism From Cyrus to Hadrian* (London: SCM, 1994), 97; E. Bresiani, "The Persian Occupation of Egypt," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 2, *The Media and Achaemenian Periods* (ed. I. Gershevitch; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 502–28, here 504; J. M. S. Delgado, "Cambyses in Sais: Political and Religious Context in Achaemenid Egypt," *Chronique d'Égypte* 79 (2020): 31–52. On Udjahorresnet, see A. B. Lloyd, "The Inscription of Udjahorresnet: A Collaborator's Testament," *JEA* 66 (1986): 166–80; J. Blenkinsopp, "The Mission of Udjahorresnet and those of Ezra and Nehemiah," *JBL* 106 (1987): 409–21. On the evidence of the Elephantine papyri, see G. Granerød, *Dimensions of Yahwism in the Persian Period: Studies in the Religion and Society of the Judean Community in Elephantine* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016) and his contribution to this volume. Cf. R. G. Kratz, "The Second Temple of Jeb and of Jerusalem," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (eds. O. Lipschits and M. Oeming; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 247–64.

¹² Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 663.

¹³ Middlemas, *The Troubles of Templeless Judah*, 66–67.

record. Consistent with the biblical hints of a return taking place at the time of Zerubbabel is information gleaned from a family archive recovered from Neirab, which lies 4 km south of Aleppo, that records the repatriation of the Nusku-gabbe family to the region of Syria from Mesopotamia during the early years of Darius (ca. 522/21 BCE).¹⁴

Because the advent of his reign was met with a series of revolts in Babylonia and across the empire, Darius I instituted a series of policies to encourage loyalty in local communities. Darius' initiatives to foster the stability and longevity of the empire played a not insignificant role in the resurgence of Yehud after the disastrous fall of Jerusalem. To his reign is attributed state interest in the reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem as well as the first true wave of returnees from Babylon.¹⁵ When seen in this way, the return of the Nusku-gabbe family from exile in Babylonia to their homeland in Syria during the early years of the reign of Darius contributed to the strategic placement of loyal subjects in the wider empire, especially at its western periphery. The efforts of Zerubbabel and Joshua (Heb. Jeshua) to encourage the repatriation of the exiles who had been deported to Babylon as well as the limited rebuilding of the temple also seem to function similarly.

While Cyrus and Cambyses sought to stabilize and secure the empire from the threat of revolt especially from the two main powers in the region of the ANE, Babylon and Egypt, Darius (522–486 BCE) set about to implement strategies to promote the long-term maintenance of the empire through fiscal and administrative reforms. His ascension to the throne coincided with a backlash throughout the empire in Elam, Babylonia, Armenia, and Egypt among the more serious of the revolts that took place. By the end of 521 BCE, Darius had resumed control over all of the former empire of Cambyses, except for Egypt, to which he would turn his attention in 519. To dissuade future revolt, Darius implemented a series of creative strategies to maintain and sustain the unity of the empire. He reorganized the kingdom to facilitate more centralized control over the conquered territories and to create security in unstable areas. During the first two years of his reign, he put into place six imperial strategies to secure his rule and the empire. These include a sophisticated propaganda campaign that linked his lineage to those he claimed as his forbearers, the Achaemenids Cyrus and Cambyses, as well as to the support and blessing of the Persian gods. Politically, he oversaw an administrative restructuring in which the lands under

¹⁴ Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 125, cites the important study by S. Timm, "Die Bedeutung der spätbabylonischen Texte aus Nērab für die Rückkehr der Judäer aus dem Exil," in *Meilenstein: Festgabe für Herbert Donner* (eds. M. Weippert and S. Timm; Ägypten und Altes Testament 30; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995), 276–88. See G. Tolini, "From Syria to Babylon and Back: The Neirab Archive," in *Exile and Return: The Babylonian Context* (eds. J. Stökl and C. Waerzeggers; BZAW 478; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 58–93.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 123–27.

Persian control were organized into 20 administrative units called satraps with a fixed yearly tribute for each. He also brought the military branch directly under the authority and control of the king. Further, he appointed and promoted loyal noble elites to positions of authority throughout the empire. In addition, he provided resources and ideological support for building projects, including the construction of temples and other holy sites, and even sponsored initiatives to codify local laws. Whereas Cyrus and Cambyses had been concerned with empire building, Darius focused his attention on risk management and the creation of centralized policies to foster long-term maintenance.

The Bisitun (Behistun) Inscription, a monumental display etched onto the rockface of a cliff located on an important trade route leading to the Persian capital Ecbatana, dates from the early years of Darius' reign. The inscription features the subjugation of numerous revolts against his reign depicted through his physical vanquishment of enemies and made possible through the support and authority of the Persian god Ahura Mazda. The inscription opens by clarifying Darius' destiny to rule the Persian empire, contains a highly ideological account of the defeat of a 'pretender' to the throne,¹⁶ presents himself as the liberator of the people, and lauds his efforts to restore sanctuaries and repatriate exiled peoples to their native homelands.

Saith Darius the King: The kingdom which had been taken away from our family that I put in its right place; I reset it on its foundation. As before, so I made the sanctuary which Gaumata the Magian destroyed, I restored to the people the pastures and the herds ... which Gaumata the Magian took away from them. (Behistun Inscription Col. 14 l.61-71)¹⁷

Written copies of the inscription were distributed throughout the many provinces of the empire in local languages. The inscription has been found on a stele set up in Babylon and a copy in Aramaic exists among the records of a Jewish military colony that existed in Egypt until the middle of the fifth century BCE called the Elephantine Papyri. Notably, the name of Darius is found on more Egyptian monuments than all of the other Persian kings put together, which signals once again that propaganda was a major initiative during his reign intended to contribute to the stabilization of the empire and to support his legitimacy as imperial ruler.

¹⁶ There are indications that the enemy vanquished and presented as a usurper by Darius was the other legitimate son of Cyrus who ruled for a number of years in Persian, while his brother Cambyses was in Egypt. For example, the reign of Smerdis known as Gaumata in the inscription marked a smooth transition in Persian governance and society. Moreover, numerous Mesopotamian business and legal documents are dated to his reign and suggest transition to his rule was a natural occurrence. See the arguments for and against presented in M. A. Dandamaev, *A Political History of the Achaemenid Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 83-91; Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 664-67.

¹⁷ R. B. Kent, *Old Persian: Grammar, Texts, Lexicon* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1953).

In the interest of space, we have focused on the three kings who implemented Achaemenid rule over the ancient world from the end of the sixth and well into the fifth centuries. They established the important parameters of the ideology of the monarch and the temple that reverberated throughout Persian rule. In the context of the consideration of Yehud in the Persian period, perhaps one of the significant points of commonality among the three rulers, Cyrus, Cambyses, and Darius, is the focus on the restoration of local communities as a strategy of empire. The Persian system depended on co-operation with local ruling classes, which in turn allowed for a degree of self-governance as long as the financial, administrative, and political interests of the Persians were not abrogated. Notably, the satrap could strip local rulers of their governing positions if Persian control and interests in the area were deemed to be under threat.¹⁸ Within this system, the former kingdom of Judah became a distinct administrative unit, one of the smallest in the Land Beyond the River, with its own provincial government and administration, and it is to the emerging province of Yehud that we now turn.¹⁹

1.1 Judah in Persian Times – The Province of Yehud

The former kingdom of Judah was subsumed within the Persian empire as the province of Yehud, which formed part of a larger administrative unit referred to as Across the River (Aramaic *abar nahara* or Babylonian *ebir nari*). It was later joined to Samaria by the time of Nehemiah in the fifth century BCE. Because Cyrus and Cambyses were more concerned with the maintenance and expansion of the empire, it appears that they primarily adopted the governing policies they inherited from the Babylonians. Under this system, the province of Yehud experienced no significant organizational changes from that known under Babylonian rule, which meant a relative degree of societal independence and self-governance.

After Babylon fell to the Persians, the imperial rulers of the former kingdom of Judah changed, but everyday life effectively remained the same for the majority of those within and outside the homeland. Ideologically, though, significant changes were made in terms of the understanding of the state and of its chief national deity, Yahweh.²⁰ The temple and royal palace had been destroyed, the king and members of the royal family had been deported to the royal court in Babylon, and the members of the temple priesthood who had not been killed or died in the downfall were deported to the Babylonian heartland along with members of the ruling classes and their families, the inhabitants of Jerusalem,

¹⁸ Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 697–98.

¹⁹ Blenkinsopp, “Temple,” 37; Hoglund, *Achaemenid Imperial Administration*, 26.

²⁰ P. R. Bedford, *Temple Restoration in Early Achaemenid Judah* (JSJSup 65; Leiden, Brill, 2001), has notably drawn attention to commonality between the ideologies of the biblical literature of the First Temple period and the early Second Temple period.

military personnel, and other skilled laborers. The society, governance, and religion of Yehud were very different from that which had existed before the fall of Jerusalem and Judah to the Babylonians. In the pre-fall period, the kingdom of Judah was a monarchy and the king was the head of the state and the cult. Although there was a high priest of the temple, the highest authority in the land was the king. In the post-fall, provincial period, the high priest of the temple became the religious leader of the province who gradually exerted increasing influence in civic and political matters. Notably, the former kingdom of Judah would never have a king again except for a brief period under the Maccabees in the second to first centuries BCE (165–63 BCE).

Communal life for the Judahites who had remained in the land had shifted north to the territory of Benjamin with an established provisional capital in Mizpah and possibly also an operative temple at the traditional and ancient sacred cultic site of Bethel or elsewhere.²¹ Biblical literature dated to the Persian period, such as Zechariah 1–8 and possibly Isaiah 56–66, sought to bolster the importance of Jerusalem as the political, religious, and social centre of the province.²² After the rise of Cyrus who authorized (some) native peoples to return and reoccupy their homelands, one of the many challenges faced by Yehud was to regenerate society for the former Judahites, including those who had remained in the land, the exiles deported to Babylonia, and other refugees who had returned after sojourning in neighboring nation-states and Egypt.²³

²¹ E. g. O. Lipschits, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005); J. Middlemas, *Troubles* and idem, *The Templeless Age: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the "Exile"* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007). See the discussion and references in J. Blenkinsopp, "The Age of the Exile," in *The Biblical World*, Vol. 1 (ed. J. Barton; London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 416–39; J. Middlemas, "Exile, Migration, and Diaspora After the Fall of Jerusalem" in *The Biblical World*, New Edition (ed. K. J. Dell; London and New York: Routledge, 2021), 519–37.

²² E. g. P. Marinkovic, "Zechariah 1–8 and the Second Temple," in *Second Temple Studies*, Vol. 2, *Temple and Community in the Persian Period* (eds. T. C. Eskenazi and K. H. Richards; JSOTSup. 175; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 88–103; Middlemas, *The Troubles of Templeless Judah*, 133–44; J. Middlemas, "Going Beyond the Myth of the Empty Land: A Reassessment of the Early Persian Period," in *Exile and Restoration Revisited: Essays on the Babylonian and Persian Periods in Memory of Peter R. Ackroyd* (eds. G. N. Knoppers and L. L. Grabbe with D. Fulton; London: T & T Clark, 2019), 174–94; K. A. Ristau, "Rebuilding Jerusalem: Zechariah's Vision within Visions," in Knoppers and Grabbe, *Exile and Restoration Revisited*, 195–213. Cf. Middlemas, *The Troubles of Templeless Judah*, 136–40, on arguments for the ideological purpose of Isa. 57:3–13 to discredit religious worship outside of Jerusalem and possibly at the otherwise legitimate location of Bethel.

²³ The timeline for the return and repatriation of some of those forcibly deported from the former kingdom of Judah remains unclear, but it is generally agreed that a mass return of exiled Judahites at the advent of Persian rule never took place and instead those who chose to return to Judah did so in waves over a number of years well into the Persian period. E. g. B. Becking, "'We All Returned as One!' Critical Notes on the Myth of the Mass Return," in O. Lipschits and M. Oeming, eds., *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, 3–18; L. L. Grabbe, "They Shall Come Rejoicing in Zion – Or Did They? The Settlement of Yehud in the Early Persian

In addition, the socio-historical situation for the imperial province of Yehud, the former kingdom of Judah, has changed in terms of governance and religion. The twin prongs of Zion theology that had permeated the thought and religious-political sphere of the southern kingdom of Judah, the Davidic king and the centrality of the palace-temple complex in Jerusalem, were no more. Not only would the province of Yehud never have a king, the priesthood of the rebuilt temple would take on greater authority in political matters. Over time, some of the members of the former kingdom forcibly deported to the Babylonian heartland chose to return to their native homeland. Back in the province of Yehud, the repatriated exiles, collectively known as the *Golah*, solidified their power and created a society under their authority and guided by the law. Religious law and piety took on increasing significance under the priestly rulers. Politically, socially, and religiously Persian period Yehud assumed its own identity distinct from that which pertained during the period of the monarchy.

According to the biblical material, there are three main stages of renewal that occurred during Persian rule which coincided with the leadership of Sheshbazaar, Zerubbabel and the priest Joshua (biblical Jeshua), and Erza/Nehemiah.²⁴ The first stage coincided with the elusive Sheshbazaar for whom we have only scant traces in the biblical literature (Ezra 1:5–11; 5:14–16; cf. 6:3–5). Soon after the creation of the Persian Empire through the military endeavors of Cyrus, Sheshbazaar was appointed as governor (פחה according to Ezra 5:14) and commissioned to return the temple vessels to Jerusalem that had been removed by Nebuchadnezzar and taken to Babylon. It is thought that Sheshbazaar was also charged with the reconstruction of the temple, but his efforts led only to laying the foundations (Ezra 5:16).²⁵ There remains a debate about whether or not Sheshbazaar was commissioned from Babylonia at the time of Cyrus to return the temple vessels or whether he was already serving as the governor of the region and had been recalled to Babylonia to collect the vessels for return.²⁶ Certainly,

Period,” in Knoppers and Grabbe, *Exile and Restoration Revisited*, 116–27 and “The Reality of the Return: The Biblical Picture Versus Historical Reconstruction,” in Stökl and Waerzeggers, *Exile and Return*, 292–307.

²⁴ Following the thorough analysis of S. Japhet, “The Temple in the Restoration Period: Reality and Ideology,” *USQR* 44 (1991): 195–251. Cf. K. Galling, *Studien zur Geschichte Israels im Persischen Zeitalter* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1964); P.R. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration: A Study of Hebrew Thought of the Sixth Century BC* (London: SCM, rep., 1994), 138–52; Grabbe, *Judaism From Cyrus to Hadrian*, 73–100; Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 119–38; J. M. Miller and J. H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (2nd edition; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 498–540.

²⁵ A. Gelston, “The Foundations of the Second Temple,” *VT* 16 (1966): 232–5.

²⁶ The account in Chronicles mentions a Shenazzar as one of the sons of the Davidic king Jehoiachin (1 Chron. 3:18). Shenazzar has sometimes been conflated with the elusive Sheshbazaar by interpreters who argue that he returned as a descendent of David with the temple vessels and laid the foundations of the temple. The association of the two men has largely been disproven and no longer features in histories of the period. It is reasonable to regard Sheshbazaar as the

his name is Babylonian, but his actual position at the time remains unclear. His activities, though, coincide with the time in which Cyrus was in Babylon and at the very least remain consistent with his policies aimed at the return of temple treasures and divine statues to their rightful places elsewhere in the empire.

According to the biblical account, actual building work on the temple in Jerusalem would only resume at a later time and in conjunction with the activities of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah as well as the civic and religious leaders, Zerubbabel and Joshua. The second stage of renewal, then, coincides with the activities associated with Haggai, Zechariah, Zerubbabel, and Joshua which are dated in the material to the years 520–518 BCE. The biblical record is consistent with the policies enacted over a period of time by Darius I (522–486 BCE) to reform and re-organize the empire in order to foster stability, greater imperial oversight, and the secure collection of taxes. The dedication of the temple is mentioned only in the Ezra account (6:14–22) and took place according to the Aramaic record in 515 BCE.²⁷ The role of Darius in, at the very least agreeing to, if not also sponsoring, the reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem as well as the return and repatriation of some of the exiles remains unclear, but highly probable. The return and repatriation of a loyal group of Persian born Judahites would have participated in Darius' attempts to foster stability throughout the far reaches of the empire just at the point when a series of revolts rocked the land.

A third phase of rebuilding took place under the leadership of Nehemiah and Ezra whose activities led to the fortification of the city, the reformation of the law, the purification and rededication of the temple, and the creation of a unified ethnically Jewish society traced to the repatriated exiles (the *Golah*). Both men were authorized by the Persian king Artaxerxes to return to Yehud from Babylon and build and reform the city and the community, with Nehemiah serving as governor of the province and Ezra as an administrative official and priest.²⁸ The books of Ezra and Nehemiah concentrate on the situation in Yehud and its strug-

last Neo-Babylonian governor of the province of Yehud who was reappointed by Cyrus, see the arguments by J. M. Silverman, "Sheshbazzar, a Judean or a Babylonian? A Note on His Identity," in Stökl and Waerzeggers, *Exile and Return*, 308–21.

²⁷ D. V. Edelman, *The Origins of the "Second Temple": Persian Imperial Policy and the Rebuilding of Jerusalem* (London: Equinox, 2005), has raised objections to dating temple reconstruction to the time of Haggai and Zechariah and suggests, instead, that it actually took place during the period associated with Ezra and Nehemiah. It is possible that the date cited in Ezra for the dedication of the temple in 515 BCE reflects an ideological number intended to coincide with the 70 years of exile prophesied by Jeremiah, but there is no clear evidence that the figure is improbable. Certainly, the Jerusalem temple remained a focal point even during the Templeless period (587–515 BCE). Further repair of or construction on the temple likely also occurred in conjunction with the mission of Nehemiah, which would explain some of the evidence highlighted in her analysis.

²⁸ The missions of Ezra and Nehemiah tend to be associated with the reign of Artaxerxes I (464–424), son of Darius I. The order of the missions remains debated, but a majority regards Nehemiah arriving in Yehud before Ezra.

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