



Revisiting Ezra 1 (vv. 1-4) with the Temple Building Inscriptions of Mesopotamia¹

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1. Introduction

The book of Ezra foregrounds the ideology of temple demolition and reconstruction that was shared across the ancient Near East over a span of three millennia.² Yet a brief treatment of the topic in the field of biblical studies

1 The earlier draft of this paper was presented at the 2022 Annual Meeting of the Eastern Great Lake Biblical Society (SBL & CBA), hosted virtually by Methodist Theological School (Ohio, USA) in March.

2 Lisbeth S. Fried, "Temple Building in Ezra 1-6", in *From the Foundations to the Crenellations: Essays on Temple Building in the Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible*, M. J. Boda and J. Novotny (eds.), (AOAT 366; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2010), 319-338. For related discussions, see Andrew R. Davis, *Reconstructing the Temple: The Royal Rhetoric of Temple Renovation in the Ancient Near East and Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 133-154; Diana Edelman, *The Origins of the 'Second' Temple: Persian Imperial Policy and the Rebuilding of Jerusalem* (London: Equinox, 2005), 151-166; Victor (Avigdor) Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in Light of Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Writings* (JSOTSupp 115; Sheffield, JSOT Press, 1992), 113-117. For further discussions in other

warrants further probing of Ezra 1 (vv. 1-4; cf. 2 Chron 36:22-23; Ezra 6:1-12), especially in light of the related temple (re-)building texts of Mesopotamia. Many scholars agree that some literary elements of the Cyrus Cylinder are indebted to the Mesopotamian building texts, which attests the enduring influence of the scribal traditions of the Babylonian school, an influence that continued into the early Persian era.³ Cyrus's self-aggrandizing report of his effortless conquest of Babylon and subsequent rehabilitation of the temple structure and its rituals effectively places his kingship on a continuum with the political and religious legacy of the Mesopotamian predecessors. It remains to be seen whether any aspects of the Mesopotamian building texts, along with the Cyrus Cylinder, will enhance our understanding of Ezra 1 (vv. 1-4), which records Cyrus's decree on behalf of the Jews.

In the book of Ezra, YHWH precipitates the authorization of the reconstruction of YHWH's temple in Jerusalem by "stirring up" (NRSV, NKJV, ESV, JPS)⁴ King Cyrus of Persia (Ezra 1:1). The Hebrew root for "stir up" (הָעִיר) is עִיר, which takes the "spirit" (רוּחַ) as its direct object: YHWH caused Cyrus king of Persia (Ezra 1:1) to issue a decree for the exiled Judeans to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the house for YHWH (Ezra 1:2). In the Old Testament, occurrences of the root עִיר are broadly attested in the context of YHWH's

postexilic books, see Woo-Chul Shin, "The Purpose of Haggai in Light of the Revelation of the Temple Rebuilding Ideology of the ANE", *Korean Journal of the Old Testament Studies* 17.2 (2011), 145-164; John Kessler, "Temple Building in Haggai: Variations on a Theme", *From the Foundations to the Crenellations*, 357-380; Antti Laato, "Temple Building and the Book of Zechariah", *From the Foundations to the Crenellations*, 381-398.

³ "Cyrus Cylinder", translated by Mordecai Cogan (COS 2.124:314).

⁴ Cf. "moved the heart of" (NIV), "roused" (R. Alter), Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018).

war on behalf of Israel, when he would instigate the “spirit” of the political leaders to act as his military agents.⁵ Among these are King Cyrus (Ezra 1:1; cf. 2 Chron 36:22), the kings of the Medes (Jer 51:11), and King Tiglath-pileser III (1 Chron 5:26). W. J. Schreiner notes that the instances involving these pagan kings are to be differentiated from other biblical instances, such as Zerubbabel and his associates (Hag 1:14), since the former evince little that is within the purview of a spiritual “awakening” of the gentile rulers beyond a rhetorical claim of their divine agency.⁶ Even if we preclude the possibility of Cyrus’s active inclusion of YHWH in the Babylonian pantheon,⁷ the question persists whether there is a comparable expression in the Mesopotamian building texts, and, if so, what it connotes.

The author offers further observations based on the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian building texts by tracing the ancient Near Eastern ideology that underlies Ezra 1:1-4, especially with respect to the initiation of the temple rebuilding by a divinely ordained king. As for Ezra 1:2-4, what is not fully addressed in E. J. Bickerman’s study of the edict of Cyrus in Ezra 1 is the imagery of the king as shepherd that comes to the fore in the Mesopotamian building texts.⁸ The royal annals of ancient Near East, inheriting the Sumerian legacy, describe the king as the shepherd of his people, often in combination with depiction of pastoral duties. In the temple building texts of Mesopotamia, the shepherd metaphor is vividly woven into the monarch’s presentation

5 W. J. Schreiner, “עזרא”, *TDOT* 10:573-574.

6 Schreiner, *TDOT* 10:574.

7 See, for example, Joachim Schaper, *Priester und Leviten im achämenidischen Juda: Studien zur Kult- und Sozialgeschichte Israels in persischer Zeit* (FAT II/31; Tübingen: Mohr, 2000), 133-134.

8 Elias J. Bickerman, “The Edict of Cyrus in Ezra 1”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 64 (1946): 244-275.

of the renovation project. However tenuous the connection between the edict of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1-4) and the Cyrus Cylinder may be, the evidence that the purpose of restoring the city and its temple is an expression of the underlying ideology of shepherd-kingship cannot be readily dismissed. Investigating the literary connection of Ezra 1 (vv.1-4) to Jeremianic and Isaianic traditions in light of the Mesopotamian building texts provides clues to the polemical trajectory of Ezra.

2. Ezra 1 (vv. 1-4) and the Temple (Re-)Building Texts of the Ancient Near East

1) Initiation of the Temple Building (Ezra 1:1)

As far as Ezra 1:1 is concerned, Schreiner's reference to êru(m) ("to awake") as the Akkadian cognate of Hebrew עָרַר does little to elucidate the semantic parameters of the Hebrew verb vis-à-vis the Mesopotamian temple building texts, for the Akkadian verb is hardly used at all in such a context.⁹ Two other Akkadian terms are noteworthy in this respect: šudkû ("to summon, to cause something to move against, to prompt, etc."; √ dekû, "to make rise, to arouse from sleep or rest, etc.")¹⁰ and šutbû ("to make someone get up, to remove, to mobilize, to make winds rise, etc."; √ tebû, "to get up, to rise, to rear up, etc.").¹¹ The semantic range of these verbs encompasses "to rouse oneself" or "to awake" as the Hebrew equiva-

9 Schreiner, *TDOT* 10:569.

10 *CAD* 3:123-128.

11 *CAD* 18:306-320

lent, although no etymological association can be made between the Hebrew word and the Akkadian counterparts. Evidently, these Akkadian verbs have many definitions, and it is necessary to restrict evaluation of their usage to texts that involve a deity's inciting or inspiring a chosen king to perform a given task.

Both Akkadian verbal forms, *šudkû* (√dekû) and *šutbû* (√tebû), are used to indicate a deity's provocation of a human agent to destroy the temple, particularly in the building texts attributed to the Neo-Babylonian king Nabonidus (555-539 BCE).¹² For example, in the building inscription about Nabonidus's renovation of the Eulmaš temple at Sippar-Anunītu, the Sumerian deity of moon and wisdom Sîn (or Nanna), is portrayed as instigating the Assyrian king Sennacherib (704-681 BC)¹³ to destroy the Babylonian city and the temple (689 BCE). The verbal form *šudkû* (√dekû) is used:

iii 26-29) (With regard to) Eulmaš of Sippar-Anunītu — which the god Sîn, king of the gods, had become angry with the city and that temple and (then) he incited Sennacherib (ú-šad-kam-ma^{md} 30-ŠEŠ.MEŠ-SU), king of Assyria, the bitter enemy, so that he (Sennacherib) turned the city and that temple into ruins ...¹⁴

Nabonidus invokes Sîn's incitement of Sennacherib and the subsequent

12 M. Van de Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East: Ca. 3000-323 BC* (2d ed.; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 278, 313.

13 Van de Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 180, 313.

14 Frauke Weiershäuser and Jamie Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Amēl-Marduk (561-560 BC), Neriglissar (559-556 BC), and Nabonidus (555-539 BC), Kings of Babylon* (RINBE 2; University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2020), 138. Cf. CAD 3:128 6b ("caused Sennacherib, the evil doer, to move against (Eulmaš and Sippar), and he ..."). All underlinings in this paper are mine for emphasis.

ruination of the temple to reinforce his supreme role as a divinely favored rebuilder of the destroyed sacred precinct—a rhetorical move that is also evinced in another account by Nabonidus of the temple destruction by the enemy forces.

In the cylinder inscription of Nabonidus discovered at Sippar, Sîn is described as being provoked to fury and causing the Medes to destroy Eḫulḫul, the temple in Ḫarrân that was originally established as “his favorite residence.” This building text features the verb šutbû (√ tebû):

Ehulhul, the temple of Sîn in Harran, where since days of yore Sîn, the great lord, had established his favorite residence — (then) his heart became angry against that city and temple and he aroused the Mede (Ummân-manda ú-šat-ba-am-ma), destroyed that temple and turned it into ruins — in my legitimate reign Bêl (and) the great lord, for the love of my kingship, became reconciled with that city and temple and showed compassion.¹⁵

Following the apologetic recounting of the desolation of the temple and the pacification of the deity, Nabonidus discloses a revelatory dream in which he saw Sîn and Marduk standing next to each other. Nabonidus states that he received Marduk’s direct command concerning the rebuilding of Sîn’s temple. When Nabonidus objects that the mighty Medes have control over the sacred precinct, Marduk assures him in a direct speech that the Medes will be re-

15 “The Sippar Cylinder of Nabonidus”, translated by Paul-Alain Beaulieu (COS 2.123A:311). Cf. Weier-shäuser and Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions*, 147. “His (Sîn’s) heart became angry with the city and that temple and he raise up a barbarian horde (the Medes) . . .”

moved, and Nabonidus affirms that Marduk's word has been fulfilled.

But Marduk spoke with me: "The Mede whom you mentioned, he, his country and the kings who march at his side will be no more." At the beginning of the third year they aroused him, Cyrus (ú-šat-bu-niš-šum-ma Kuraš), the king of Anshan, his second in rank. He scattered the vast Median hordes with his small army.¹⁶

The inscription markedly captures the historical incident of the Persian revolt against the Medes under the leadership of Cyrus the Great (ca. 552 BCE), who may have been an ally of Nabonidus before the conquest of Babylon (539 BCE).¹⁷ In the text, these Medes are portrayed as challenging Cyrus to battle, a battle in which he routs them. If the two occurrences of the verb šutbû (√tebû) are juxtaposed, it is manifest that Cyrus's successful campaign against the Medes is not an isolated incident unrelated to Sîn's arousal of the Medes. The anger of Sîn, the tutelary deity of Eḫullḫul, had been kindled against the city and the temple; as a result, he "aroused" the Medes to destroy them. Nevertheless, the Medes' desecration of the Babylonian temple was punished when Cyrus, "aroused" by the Median kings, defeated the Median army in accordance with Marduk's word. In his building account, Nabonidus is shown to be a king who venerates both Sîn and Marduk, the joint heads of

16 "The Sippar Cylinder of Nabonidus", translated by Paul-Alain Beaulieu (COS 2.123A:311). See Beaulieu's discussion of the ambiguity associated with Cyrus's supposed appellation, "his young servant" (ARAD-su ša-aḫ-ri), in footnote 7. Cf. Weiershäuser and Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions*, 147. "When (my) third year arrived, they had Cyrus (II), king of the land Anšan, a young servant of his (Astyages'), rise up against him (Astyages), and he (Cyrus) scattered the extensive barbarian horde (the Medes) ..."

17 "The Sippar Cylinder of Nabonidus", translated by Paul-Alain Beaulieu (COS 2.123A:311).

the pantheon in his dream.¹⁸ After having destroyed the temple, Sîn has been placated by the time of Nabonidus's reign, and Marduk issues a command to Nabonidus to rebuild the temple on behalf of Sîn. The verb šutbû (𐎶𐎵𐎶) is apparently a theo-politically charged term in the literary unit: amid the foreign military operations, two Mesopotamian deities determine the course of the events with respect to the destruction and reconstruction of the temple.

By contrast, in the temple rebuilding account of the Neo-Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562 BCE)¹⁹, Marduk, the patron deity of Babylon, is described as directly impelling the king to undertake the renovation project. In this case, the verb šudkû (𐎶𐎠𐎶) is employed. For instance, in his record of the renovation of E-urimin-ankia, the ziggurat of Borsippa, Nebuchadnezzar II recounts the inception of the building project as follows:

At that time E-urimin-ankia, the ziggurat of Borsippa, which a former king had built and elevated to forty-two cubits but had not raised its summit, (which) since remote days had fallen into ruins and whose drainage openings had not been kept in order, ... Marduk, my great lord, prompted me to rebuild it (a-na e-bi-ši-ša be-li ra-bé-ù dAMAR.UTU ú-ša-ad-kan-an-ni li-ib-ba).²⁰

18 See comments on modern scholars' subscription to the so-called "pro-Cyrus propaganda" that generated a misleading portrayal of Nabonidus as exalting the moon-god Sîn over the Babylon's chief deity Marduk in Weiershäuser and Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions*, 11 (esp. footnote 93). Relating to historical reconstructions of Cyrus's conquest of Babylon, see Kratz, Reinhard G, "From Nabonidus to Cyrus," in *Melammu Symposia III: Ideologies as Intercultural Phenomena* (A. Panaino and G. Pettinato (eds.) (Milan: Università di Bologna & Isiao, 2002), 143-156; Vanderhoof, David, "Cyrus II, Liberator or Conqueror?: Ancient Historiography concerning Cyrus in Babylon", in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, O. Lipschits and M. Oeming (eds.) (PA: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 351-372.

19 Van de Mierop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 276-277, 313.

20 "Nebuchadnezzar II's Restoration of E-Urimin-Ankia, The Ziggurat of Borsippa", translated by Paul-

In a commemorative rock-cut relief in the village of Brisa (Wadi El-Sharbin) in Lebanon²¹, Nebuchadnezzar II also claims that Marduk had “prompted” his “heart” to renovate the shrines of his deities:

(viii 41) I am intent to the renovation of the cult centres of the gods and goddess, to which the great lord Marduk has prompted my heart (ú-ša-ad-kan-ni lib-bi), I provide for the cult centres, I renew the sanctuaries. With the renovation of the cult centers of the gods and goddess, I began to build in Babylon a palace, my royal dwelling place.²²

With respect to the rebuilding of the cultic centers, Nebuchadnezzar II comments in another text that his heart motivated him to do the work because of Marduk’s order:

(ii 54) (As for) the construction in the cult centers of the gods and goddesses that the great lord, the god Marduk, had commissioned and (my) heart prompted me (ú-ša-ad-ka-an-ni li-ib-ba-am) (to do), reverently, I worked on it without interruption (and) I completed its work.²³

Alain Beaulieu (COS 2,122B:309); Stephen Langdon, *Die neubabylonischen Königsinschriften* (VAB 4; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1912), 98.

21 Although not a temple rebuilding text, the inscription describes the king’s military exploits and his access to Lebanon’s fine timber used for the temple construction.

22 Rocío Da Riva et al., “RIBO Nebuchadnezzar II WBC”, n.p. [cited 8 April 2022]. Online: http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/ribo/babylon7/pager#ribo/babylon7:Q005601_project-en.28. See also Rocío Da Riva, *The Twin Inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar at Brisa (Wadi esh-Sharbin, Lebanon): A Historical and Philological Study* (AFOB 32; Wien, Institut für Orientalistik d. Universität Wien, 2012).

23 Frauke Weiershäuser and Jamie Novotny, “Nebuchadnezzar II 031 [via RIBO/BABYLON7]”, n.p. [cited 8 April 2022]. Online: <http://oracc.org/ribo/Q005502/>.

These examples show that the Akkadian terms *šudkû* (√dekû) and *šutbû* (√tebû) are being used in the mytho-historical story to indicate the divinely originated causes of the destruction and restoration of the temple. In Nabonidus's rebuilding account, *šudkû* (√dekû) and *šutbû* (√tebû) are used interchangeably in a negative sense, as in "incite" or "arouse." Remarkably, these verbs were distinctly deployed in the context of the deity's abandonment of its own temple or of the deity's judgment of the enemy forces associated with the destruction of the temple. In the royal corpus of Nebuchadnezzar II, both *šudkû* (√dekû) and *šutbû* (√tebû) are attested; but the former usage predominates, implying a positive connotation, as in "prompt" or "motivate."²⁴ With the limited extant texts in our survey, we cannot make a conclusive argument about the strand of scribal tradition responsible for the distinctive occurrences of these verbs during the Neo-Babylonian era. Nevertheless, if such singular modes of expression, which entail a deity's provoking or inspiring of a royal subject, are absent in other surviving Neo-Assyrian or Neo-Babylonian temple rebuilding texts,²⁵ we may speculate that the usage of these verbs are indicative of a scribal tendency peculiar to the respective period.

24 Also remarkable is the fact that Nabonidus is the direct recipient of the divine command in the dream theophany, whereas Nebuchadnezzar II, more indirectly influenced, is induced in his heart by the deity to engage in a restorative undertaking.

25 A notable exception would be Esarhaddon (680-669 BCE), who states that his heart gave considerable attention to rebuilding the temple, albeit without directly mentioning deity's incitement (e.g., Esarhaddon 104, ii49b; 105, iii29b; 116, r7). In one instance, however, Esarhaddon mentions that his deities "opened his mind" so that he was motivated to rebuild the shrines and the temple (Esarhaddon 113 20). See Erle Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria* (680-669 BC) (RINAP 4; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011).

2) Cyrus in Isaiah, Chronicles, and Ezra (Ezra 1:1-4, 5-7)

In the prophetic traditions, the Hebrew verb עורר is theologically meaningful for describing YHWH's initiation as a divine warrior of the military campaign against Israel's enemy (Isa 51:9) or his provoking of kings or nations to deliver or punish Israel.²⁶ YHWH is seen as inciting the "spirit" of Babylon's destroyer (Jer 51:1), the Median kings (Jer 51:11), as well as Zerubbabel (Hag 1:14). Like a mighty warrior (Isa 42:13), YHWH "stirs up" (יַעֲרִיר) his own zeal against Israel's enemies in order to save Israel, or YHWH has the enemy nations "stirred up" (יַעֲרִיר) against Israel (Jer 6:22; 25:32) because of her apostasy. More significantly, as in the Isaianic passages (Isa 41:2; 42:25; 45:13), YHWH "stirs up" the Persian king Cyrus in the context of a divine war against Israel's enemies.²⁷

The literary formulation of Ezra 1:1-4 derives from the Chronicler's adoption of the Jeremianic pairing of the verb "stir up" with the object "spirit" (cf. Jer 51:1, 11).²⁸ In the books of Chronicles, YHWH awakens the spirit of the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser to exile the two and half tribes of Israel (1 Chron

26 Schreiner, *TDOT* 10:572.

27 Other passages elaborate the divine purpose of enlisting Cyrus as YHWH's earthly agent, as is similarly observed in the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian building texts. In Isaiah 45:13, YHWH is portrayed as "stirring up" Cyrus "in righteousness" to rebuild Jerusalem and emancipate the Judean exiles. Here, YHWH's election of Cyrus "in righteousness" (Isa 45:13) apparently coincides with the word play observed above in the Cyrus Cylinder, in which Marduk's quest for a "righteous king" and Cyrus's devotion to rule with "justice and righteousness" (lines 12, 14) are aligned for the sake of literary emphasis. For other parallels between Isaiah and the Cyrus Cylinder, see Aaron Lichtenstein, "The Cyrus Cylinder and Isaiah 40-50", *Dor le Dor* 16 (1988): 164-169.

28 Recent discussions concerning redactional issues of these biblical books can be found in, A. M. Gilhooley, *The Edict of Cyrus and Notions of Restoration in Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles* (HBM 89; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2020); P. L. Redditt, "The Dependence of Ezra-Nehemiah on 1 and 2 Chronicles", in *Unity and Disunity in Ezra-Nehemiah: Redaction, Rhetoric, and Reader*, M. J. Boda and P. L. Redditt (eds.) (HBM 17; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), 216-240.

5:26) and awakens the spirit of the Persian king Cyrus king to authorize the return of the Judean exiles to Zion (2 Chron 36:22-23). As for the literary formulation “YHWH stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia” recorded in 2 Chronicles 36:22 and Ezra 1:1 (cf. vv. 22-23; Ezra 1:1), the Chronicler’s reliance on both Jeremianic and Isaianic tradition is evident. The reference to YHWH’s “awaken[ing]” (הִעִיר) the “spirit” (רוּחַ) of his royal servant, found only in the Jeremianic tradition, is conjoined with explicit mention of Cyrus, who is heralded as YHWH’s anointed in the book of Isaiah (cf. Isa 44-45). The singular references to the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy and to the incitement of Cyrus’s spirit in Chronicles 36:22 (cf. Ezra 1:1) imply that the Chronicler is rhetorically appealing to both prophetic traditions in interpreting the historic return of the Jews.

Regarding the Hebrew idiom הִעִיר רוּחַ in Ezra 1:1, B. Levine opines that despite their awareness of the implicit ideology, it is unlikely that “Cyrus’s scribes” would have known such a “distinctive way of expressing it,” since the expression is “rather distinctive in biblical Hebrew usage.”²⁹ However, it is hard to rule out the possibility that the scribe employing the particular Hebrew phrase was entirely unaware of the Akkadian precedent (i.e., *šudkû* or *šutbû*), which expresses in parallel form how God incites the heart of his earthly appointee. It is more likely that the scribe of the Chronicler’s earlier sources using the idiom was acquainted with the Akkadian counterpart in the Mesopotamian literary contexts, if not with Nabonidus’s specific account of

29 Baruch A. Levine, review of E. Bickerman, *Comparative Perspectives on Jewish and Christian History: Studies in Jewish and Christian History Part One*, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 99 (1979), 84.

how Marduk set Cyrus against the Medes. Moreover, what is remarkable in the book of Ezra is that the Hebrew phrase “awaken[ing]” (הָעִירָה) the “spirit” (רוּחַ) is applied not only to the pagan king Cyrus (Ezra 1:1) but also to all of the Judean exiles, including the chieftains of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and the Levites (Ezra 1:5). The seeming “democratization”³⁰ of YHWH’s instigation is peculiar to the book of Ezra in that earlier occurrences of the Hebrew idiom in the Jeremianic and Isaianic texts were mostly confined to discussions of a supreme political figure or a nation. The theological gist of 2 Chronicle 36:22-23, repeated in Ezra 1:1-3 with only minor deviations, is that YHWH is sovereign over all of the historic events, including the election of the pagan king Cyrus, leading to the prophesied return of the exiled Jews from Babylonia to Yehud. Evincing his awareness of the propagandistic pronouncements of the Mesopotamian monarchs, the Chronicler’s formulation of the edict of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1-3) offers a historico-theological commentary that reorients the postexilic audience toward YHWH’s salvific role the redemptive history of Israel.

Notably, the declaration of YHWH’s appointment of Cyrus as his shepherd (Isa 44:28) is interlaced with the new exodus motif by way of two complementary verses (vv. 25, 27) in Isaiah 44:24-28.³¹ YHWH’s confounding of the “signs”

30 According to Sara Japhet, the notion of “democratization” is evident throughout Ezra 1-6 in that the “whole people,” across the socio-political spectrum of the Judahite returnees, are cast as the “historical protagonist” in the rebuilding process. Sara Japhet, *From the Rivers of Babylon to the Highlands of Judah: Collected Studies on the Restoration Period* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 87.

31 In the larger literary framework of Isaiah (40-55), the imagery of a shepherd-king permeates the account of YHWH’s promise of Judah’s restoration. In fulfillment of the prophetic oracles, YHWH will rebuild and repopulate Jerusalem and the Judean cities (44:26). Projected as the shepherd gathering “the lambs in his arms” (40:11), YHWH assures Israel that he will gather back Israel’s descendants “from

(אֲחֹזִית, v. 25) of pagan magicians and upholding his promises as mediated by the prophets (Isa 44:25-26) is reminiscent of the “signs” of YHWH that—as mediated by Moses in accordance with YHWH’s commands (Exod 4:8, 9, 17, 28, 30; 7:3; 10:1, 2)—prevailed against the Egyptian magicians. YHWH’s drying up of the ocean deep (צֹלָה, Isa 44:27) conjures his victory over the deep waters of the Red Sea (תְּהוֹמוֹת, Exod 15:5, 8). Elsewhere in Isaiah, similar strands of the new exodus motif are identified with the shepherd imagery of nourishment and protection in the context of Israel’s return from Babylon. In Isaiah 48:20-21, for instance, YHWH redeems Israel, leads his people out of Babylon and through the wilderness, and quenches their thirst with the water from the rock (Exod 17:5-7). In Isaiah 52:11-12, YHWH’s people depart from Babylon with the temple vessels, which recalls how the Israelites in their flight Egypt acquired from the Egyptians the precious items that will later be used for the Tabernacle (Exod 11:2-3; 12:35-36)—a reversal of the Babylonian exile, when YHWH’s vessels from the temple were carried off to Babylon (cf. 2 Chron 36:18).

the east and from the west” (43:5) and lead them (49:10). The human instrument for accomplishing “all of [YHWH]’s plans (lit: pleasure, 44:28b)” will be Cyrus, YHWH’s “shepherd” (44:28a) and his “anointed one” (45:1), who will rebuild Jerusalem (44:28c) and lay the foundations of the temple (44:28d). See also L. S. Fried, “Cyrus the Messiah? The Historical Background to Isaiah 45:1”, *Harvard Theological Review* 95 (2002): 373-393; R. E. Watts, “Consolation or Confrontation? Isaiah 40-55 and the Delay of the New Exodus”, *Tyndale Bulletin* 41 (1990), 31-35; H.M. Barstad, *A Way in the Wilderness: The “Second Exodus” in the Message of Second Isaiah* (JSSM 12; Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1989); D.A. Patrick, “Epiphany Imagery in Second Isaiah’s Portrayal of a New Exodus”, *Hebrew Annual Review* 8 (1984), 125-141; J. Blenkinsopp, “Scope and Depth of the Exodus Tradition in Deutero-Isaiah 40-55”, *Concilium* 2/10 (1966), 22-26. For arguments against the pervasiveness of a Second Exodus theme in Isaiah 40-55, see Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, *For the Comfort of Zion: The Geographical and Theological Location of Isaiah 40-55* (VTSup 139; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 156-203; Ø. Lund, *Way Metaphors and Way Topics in Isaiah 40-55* (FAT II/28, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 4-9; W. Zimmerli, “Der ‘Neue Exodus’ in der Verkündigung der beiden grossen Exilpropheten”, *Gottes Offenbarung: Gesammelte Aufsätze zum Alten Testament* (W. Zimmerli ed.) (TB 19; München: Chr. Kaiser 1963), 199.

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But their new exodus will not be “a hasty flight” (בְּחַפְזָא, Isaiah 52:12; cf. Exod 12:11), since YHWH will be ahead of them, leading, and behind them, guarding (cf. Exod 14:18-31).

The prominence of YHWH as the shepherd-king par excellence of Israel in the book of Isaiah is epitomized by his appointment of Cyrus as his earthly shepherd-king with the task of rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple (i.e., Isa 44:28; cf. Isa 45:1).³² Such an ideology of kingship—cast in the shepherd imagery—is intricately woven into the building texts of Mesopotamia and the Cyrus Cylinder.³³ The Cyrus Cylinder—whose literary components conforms with those of the Mesopotamian building texts—originally functioned as a dedicatory inscription for the building project in Babylonia.³⁴ Commentators generally agree that the cylinder text pertains to the repatriation of the deported gods and their people, even if that repatriation was limited to the cities

32 See also Lichtenstein, “The Cyrus Cylinder and Isaiah 40-50”, 164-169.

33 While there is a general consensus that the Achaemenid Persian kings were lenient towards the local cults of the empire, the authenticity of the Cyrus's edict in Ezra (1:2-4) and the biblical decree's relationship to the Cyrus Cylinder have been debated. See related discussions in Roland de Vaux, “Decrees of Cyrus and Darius on the Rebuilding of the Temple”, in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1971), 76-78; Amélie Kuhrt, “The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy”, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 25 (1983): 83-97; Joseph Blenkinsopp, “The Mission of Udhajhorresnet and Those of Ezra and Nehemiah”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (1987): 413; Schaper, *Priester und Leviten im achämenidischen Juda*, 133-134; Peter R. Bedford, *Temple Restoration in Early Achaemenid Judah* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 142-143; Edelman, *The Origins of the “Second” Temple*, 184-185; Lester L. Grabbe, “The ‘Persian Documents’ in the Book of Ezra: Are They Authentic?”, in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, O. Lipschits and M. Oeming (eds.) (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 531-570; Jong Kun Lee, “The Cyrus Oracle and the Cyrus Cylinder,” *Korean Journal of the Old Testament Studies* 19, 2 (2013): 128-166. (In Korean)

34 See the discussion of misleading scholarly opinions on the pro-Cyrus propaganda with the strain of an anti-Nabonidus rhetoric in R. J. van der Spek, “Cyrus the Great, Exiles, and Foreign Gods: A Comparison of Assyrian and Persian Policies on Subject Nations”, in *Extraction & Control: Studies in Honor of Matthew W. Stolper* (M. Kozuh et al, eds) (SAOC 68; Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2014), 233-264.

of ancient Mesopotamia and Iran.³⁵ In this respect, Cyrus's statements in Ezra 1:2-4 resemble those of the cylinder (esp. lines 28-34): both records portray Cyrus as the favored agent who implements the divine command, is given the task of rebuilding of the temple, and resettles the people as part of the restoration project.³⁶ Admittedly, the return of the Judean exiles is not mentioned in the inscription. But in the ancient Near East, mobilization by the sovereign of a displaced population was a common royal initiative, especially for the purpose of rebuilding city and temple.³⁷

Reference to the sovereign's shepherdship appears in a variety of contexts, most notably those pertaining to reverence for cultic centers and the gathering of a scattered people. For example, the formulaic epithet of the Neo-Assyrian king Ashurbanipal features the "obedient shepherd" overseeing the "four quarters (of the world)" who rebuilt the temple of his deity.

For the god Enlil, lord of the lands, his lord: Ashurbanipal, his obedient shepherd, mighty king, king of the four quarters (of the world), (re)built Ekur, his beloved

35 Van der Spek, "Cyrus the Great, Exiles, and Foreign Gods" , 259; Bob Becking, "We All Returned as One! Critical Notes on the Myth of the Mass Return" , in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, O. Lipschits and M. Oeming (eds.) (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 3-18; Lester L. Grabbe, "The Reality of the Return: The Biblical Picture Versus Historical Reconstruction" , in *Exile and Return: The Babylonian Context*, J. Stökl and C. Waezeggers (eds.) (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 296-298. See also footnote 25.

36 Van der Spek, "Cyrus the Great, Exiles, and Foreign Gods" , 257.

37 Van der Spek, "Cyrus the Great, Exiles, and Foreign Gods" , 258-259. For example, the Assyrian king Esarhaddon boasts of how he restored Babylon, which was ruined during the reign of his father Sennacherib, and repopulated the city with Assyrians and Babylonians. Esarhaddon asserts that "from Elam to the land of Hatti" he liberated enslaved Babylonians and presented them to Marduk. To renovate Sin's temple, the Babylonian king Nabonidus deported the inhabitants of Babylon and Borsippa "from the border of Egypt . . . to the Lower Sea (Persian Gulf)." E. J. Bickerman, "The Edict of Cyrus in Ezra" , in *Studies in Jewish and Christian History* (AGAJU 9; Leiden: Brill, 1976), 95.

temple, with baked bricks.³⁸

In the case of Esarhaddon, the emphasis is also on depicting a royal shepherd who rules the gods' people in "truth and justice."

...let (my) kingship be sustaining to the people forever like the plant of life so that I may shepherd their populace in truth and justice;...³⁹

The king's faithful shepherdship of the people and his royal responsibility of administering "truth and justice" (kit-te u mi-ša-ri) are closely related ideas in the ideology of kingship of the ancient Near East.⁴⁰ As loyal agents of Shamash in implementing just rule, the Mesopotamian kings adopted the royal designation muštēširu, or "securer of justice,"⁴¹ which literally means

38 Grant Frame, *Rulers of Babylonia: From the Second Dynasty of Isin to the End of Assyrian Domination* (1157-612 BC) (RIMP 2; Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1995, repr., 2002), 222 (Ashurbanipal B.6.32.16). See also Ashurbanipal B.6.32.17 (p. 223) and B.6.32.18 (p. 224).

39 Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon*, 208 (105, viii 10-15). See also Esarhaddon 104, vi1; 110, ii' 1'; 113, 28b.

40 As Eckart Frahm mentions, the static and dynamic aspects of the sun are well captured by the Akkadian phrase "truth and justice," or kittu (kānu) u mišaru (ešēru), which literally means "steadiness and directedness." In the worldview of the ancient Near East, it was common to associate the king with the sun, for the sun embodied such paradigmatic characteristics of an ideal king as paramount brilliance, omnipresence, and cosmic stability. Eckart Frahm, "Rising Suns and Falling Stars: Assyrian Kings and the Cosmos", in *Experiencing Power, Generating Authority: Cosmos, Politics, and the Ideology of Kingship in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia* (J. A. Hill et al., eds.) (Philadelphia, PA: the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2013), 100-101.

41 Frahm, "Rising Suns and Falling Stars", 101. The static nature of the sun is associated with the idea of upholding a cosmic balance, and its dynamic nature is associated with the capacity to restabilize the cosmic order by countering the forces that jeopardize it. Jane A. Hill, Philip Jones, and Antonio J. Morales, "Comparing Kingship in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia: Cosmos, Politics and Landscape", in *Experiencing Power, Generating Authority: Cosmos, Politics, and the Ideology of Kingship in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia* (J. A. Hill et al., eds.) (Philadelphia, PA: the University of Pennsylvania

“He who guides aright.”⁴² The Sumerian word pair *nì-gi-na* (“static”) and *nì-si-sá* (“dynamic”) is equivalent to the Akkadian word pair *kittum* (“truth”) and *mīšarum* (“justice”): the king is portrayed as a good shepherd of Shamash, especially in his capacity to rectify “unfair situations” as he searches for the “lost flock and sets them back on the right path.”⁴³ As for the shepherd-king charged with the responsibility of setting things aright as an earthly agent, the sphere of restoration indicated by the Mesopotamian building texts includes the temple precinct in ruins as well as the exiled gods and the scattered populace. In another inscription, Esarhaddon asserts that the goddess Zarpanītu has endowed him with the task of “renovating the destroyed shrines” and “shepherding all of the people.”⁴⁴

Cyrus the Great also declares that he “shepherded with justice and righteousness” all the “black-headed people,” words reminiscent of the royal ascriptions of the Neo-Assyrian king Esarhaddon.

He (Marduk) made the land of Gutium and all the Umman-manda bow in submission at his feet. And he (Cyrus) shepherded with justice and righteousness all the black-headed people, over whom he (Marduk) had given him victory. Marduk, the

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2013), 8.

42 Dominique Charpin, “I Am the Sun of Babylon’: Solar Aspects of Royal Power in Old Babylonian Mesopotamia”, in *Experiencing Power, Generating Authority: Cosmos, Politics, and the Ideology of Kingship in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia* (J. A. Hill et al., eds.) (Philadelphia, PA: the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2013), 74.

43 Charpin, “I Am the Sun of Babylon”, 74.

44 Erle Leichty, “Esarhaddon 109 [via RIBO/BABYLON6]”, n.p. [cited 8 April 2022]. Online: <http://oracc.org/ribo/Q003338/>. Cf. Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon*, 222 (Esarhaddon 109). In the online version, Leichty corrects the print version which states “renovating the august shrines” to “renovating the destroyed shrines” (‘ab-tā-a-ti, i 14’).

great lord, guardian (?) of his people, looked with gladness upon his good deeds and upright heart. He ordered him to march to his city Babylon. The god Marduk, the great lord, the one who nurtures his people, look[ed] with pleasure upon his good deeds and righteous heart.⁴⁵

The extant lines in the cylinder begin by alluding to Belshazzar's inept leadership in both the religious sphere and the political sphere. The misdeeds that Cyrus recounts include the former monarch's egregious sancta trespases against Marduk, Babylon's patron deity, concerning the rituals and shrines, and the relentless imposition of heavy labor upon the inhabitants. Cyrus asserts that Marduk responded to their cries by wrathfully deserting the city, resulting in the abandonment of city by other gods as well and the desolation of their habitats. After Marduk's wrath had been placated, Marduk, who is hailed by Cyrus as the divine nurturer (lit: "the male nursemaid") of his people (line 14, *tārû*), appointed Cyrus to march against Babylon, which the king conquered without a battle. The shepherd imagery of Cyrus is conspicuous in its repeated use of the verb *še'û* (to seek out):

He surveyed and looked throughout all the lands, (Line 12) searching (*iš-te-e'-e-ma*) for a righteous king whom he would support. He called out his name: Cyrus, king of Anshan; he pronounced his name to be king over all (the world) ... (Line 14) And he (Cyrus) shepherded (*iš-te-né-e'-e-ši-na-a-tim*) with justice and righteousness all

45 "Cyrus Cylinder", translated by Mordecai Cogan (COS 2.124:315).

the black-headed people, over whom he (Marduk) had given him victory.⁴⁶

In lines 12 and 14, the verb *še'û* correlates Marduk's active search for a "righteous king" and Cyrus's response to that divine appointment by sedulously attending to the welfare of the people "with justice and righteousness." Using the same verbal form, this concept is amplified in the section of the cylinder in which Cyrus reiterates his zeal for the "welfare of the city of Babylon" and "all its sacred centers." He emphasizes that he alleviated the "weariness" of the citizens of Babylon and released them from their servitude. That he repaired the city's wall is also expressed in terms of the verb.

(Line 24) My vast army moved about Babylon in peace; I did not permit anyone to frighten (the people of) [Sumer] and Akkad. I sought (*áš-te-e'-e*) the welfare of the city of Babylon and all its sacred centers. As for the citizens of Babylon, upon whom he imposed corvee which was not the god's will and not befitting them, I relieved their weariness and freed them from their service (?). ... (Line 38) I sought (*áš-te-e'-ma*), to strengthen the [construction(?)] of Dur-Imgur-Enlil, the great wall of Babylonia.⁴⁷

On the whole, the king is depicted as a royal shepherd and the faithful

⁴⁶ "Cyrus Cylinder", translated by Mordecai Cogan (COS 2.124:315). See also Irving Finkel, "The Cyrus Cylinder: the Babylonian Perspective", in *The Cyrus Cylinder: The King of Persia's Proclamation from Ancient Babylon* (I. Finkel ed.) (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 4-7; Alexa Bartelmus and Jamie Novotny, "Cyrus II 01", n.p. [cited 10 April 2022]. Online: <http://oracc.org/ribo/Q006653/>. While Cogan and Finkel opt to translate *iš-te-né-e'-e-ši-na-a-tim* as "he shepherded," Bartelmus and Novotny render it as "he was assiduous towards their welfare."

⁴⁷ "Cyrus Cylinder", translated by Mordecai Cogan (COS 2.124:315-316).

earthly agent of the patron deity Marduk, who is in turn depicted as the great shepherd in the ancient Near East.⁴⁸ Cyrus is styled as earnestly seeking to secure the well-being of the Babylonians and to ensure the proper care of cultic centers through his just and righteous rule. In fact, it is attested that the word “to seek out” has been used along with the noun “shepherd” in one of the Akkadian incantations texts, as in “shepherd who seeks out pasture for men” (rē’û muš-te-’û rīta ana amēli).⁴⁹ Although the usual term for “shepherding” or “shepherdship” (Akk. rē’ûtu) is not used in the Cyrus Cylinder, a comparison with the ancient Near Eastern texts reveals that repeated usage of this comparable term in the cylinder inscription serves to heighten the shepherd imagery of the king.⁵⁰

It is in the context of this ideological undercurrent that the return of the Judean exiles, attended by the assurance of sponsorship for temple rebuilding, is promulgated by the edict of Cyrus in Ezra 1:2-4, even if Cyrus as shepherd-king is invoked only allusively. This understanding sheds light on the literary accretion unique to Ezra that describes the natives’ contributions for the returning Jews in Ezra 1:4. The mention of local contributions for the prospective returnees in Ezra 1:4 serves as an addendum to the decree in the

48 See also Johannes Haubold, “‘Shepherds of the People’: Greek and Mesopotamian Perspectives”, in *Mesopotamia in the Ancient World: Impact, Continuities, Parallels: Proceedings of the Seventh Symposium of the Melammu Project Held in Obergurgl, Austria, November 4-8, 2013* (R. Rollinger and E. van Drogen, eds.) (MS 7; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2015), 252-253.

49 CAD 17:359 (CT 16 12 i 44f).

50 The language of pious “striving (aštēma)” is also found in the temple building accounts of other Neo-Babylonian kings. See, Madhavi Nevader, “Picking Up the Pieces of the Little Prince: Refractions of Neo-Babylonian Kingship Ideology in Ezekiel 40-48?”, in *Exile and Return: The Babylonian Context*, J. Stökl and C. Waezeggers (eds.) (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 283.

Chronicler's version (2 Chron 36:22-23; cf. Ezra 1:1-3). Ezra 1:5-7 confirms the due fulfillment of this edict of Cyrus in detail. Having prompted the spirit of the Persian king Cyrus, YHWH prompted the spirit of everyone, including the tribal and religious leaders of the Judean exiles, to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. In Ezra 1:7, Cyrus is characterized as returning the temple vessels that Nebuchadnezzar took from the First Temple in Jerusalem (2 Chron 36:18), which is analogous to how the Mesopotamian monarchs returned the gods to their original abode.⁵¹ However, the Mesopotamian building texts highlight the "royal sponsorship" of the restoration of the temple offerings and the ritual paraphernalia, not the "popular funding" of the project to rebuild the temple of the foreign deity.⁵²

In its depiction of the local residents as supporting the Judean returnees, Ezra 1:6 indirectly alludes to the Israelites' plundering of the Egyptian riches (Exod 3:21-22; 11:2-3; 12:35-36).⁵³ This portrayal is comparable to that of the fulfillment of the Jeremianic and Isaianic oracles regarding the return of YHWH's vessels from Babylon (Jer 27:21-22; Isa 52:11-12). But in the Jeremianic tradition, it is YHWH who will bring back the vessels; in the Isaianic tradition, it is the religious leaders of Judah who will bring back the vessels (cf. Lam 4:13-16).⁵⁴ Although the latter reference in the Isaianic passage appears in association

51 Fried, "Temple Building in Ezra 1-6", 321-326.

52 Levine, review of E. Bickerman, 84.

53 Although some refute the notion that Ezra 1 contains a direct allusion to the exodus motif, many commentators concur that the narrative bears some degree of exodus imagery, possibly in conjunction with the pilgrimage motif (e.g., Knowles). See B. Becking, "Does Ezra Present the Return from Exile as a Second Exodus?" *Biblische Notizen* 177 (2018): 65-73; M. D. Knowles, "Pilgrimage Imagery in the Returns in Ezra," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123 (2004): 57-74.

54 Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, *For the Comfort of Zion*, 360.

with the new exodus motif, the focus is on the Judahite leadership who bring back the vessels, not on the laity. In this way, Ezra deviates from the earlier prophets by distinguishing the role of the Persian monarch from that of the laity. The theo-polemical rationale for this dichotomy would be the desire to emphasize the theme of the new exodus by way of highlighting the role of the people as a whole with respect to the temple construction.⁵⁵

3. Conclusion

The foregoing study of the temple (re-)building texts of Mesopotamia and the Cyrus Cylinder reaches several findings that illuminate Cyrus's edict (Ezra 1:1-4). The peculiar Hebrew idiom "stir up the spirit of" (הָעִיר אֶת־רוּחַ), which is used in Ezra 1:1 (cf. 2 Chron 36:22; Jer 51:11; 1 Chron 5:26), may be compared with the Akkadian terms šudkû (dekû) and šutbû (tebû), which are found in the temple renovation texts of Nebuchadnezzar II and Nabonidus. In the texts of Nebuchadnezzar II, the verbal form šudkû occurs more often, signifying the affirmative meaning of "prompt" or "motivate." Somewhat similar to the Hebrew counterpart הָעִיר אֶת־רוּחַ, one of the building inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar II adopts the direct object "my heart" when using the verb to describe the arousal of the deity. In the case of Nabonidus, the two Akkadian verbal forms šudkû (dekû) and šutbû (tebû) are employed rather interchange-

55 See Japhet's mention of the "process of decentralization," whereby the Judahite exiles experience empowerment of the "popular representatives" while living under the Persian rule. Japhet, *From the Rivers of Babylon to the Highlands of Judah*, 72, 74.

ably, as in “incite” or “arouse,” to describe how a deity provokes a military agent to destroy the temple precinct. What is notable in Nabonidus’s deployment of the expression is his reference to Cyrus, who is indirectly summoned by Marduk as an earthly appointee to help Nabonidus restore Eḫulḫul, the temple of Sîn in Ḫarrān. The emphasis on the deity’s prompting or incitement of a human royal subject or a nation in these temple building texts reinforces the underlying rhetoric that the respective king is a chosen instrument of a divinely ordained project. In this respect, YHWH’s stirring up of the spirit of Cyrus in Ezra 1:1 reflects the Chronicler’s innovative combination of Jeremiatic and Isaianic traditions in a way that corresponds to the Mesopotamian texts.

A further implication of this line of reasoning is that one of the common denominators of the Cyrus Cylinder and the edict of Cyrus in Ezra 1, which alludes to Cyrus as YHWH’s shepherd in the context of temple rebuilding, is the ideology of shepherd-kingship. The shepherd-king of the ancient Near East was charged with the duty of redressing the disorder wreaked by divine wrath, including restoration of the temple structure, gods, and scattered people. This idea is also evident in Cyrus’s royal rhetoric employing the Akkadian verb *še’û*, which showcases the sedulous attention of the Mesopotamian monarchs in rectifying cultic and civil aberrations. The final form of the text in Ezra 1:1-4 in combination with the theological commentary of Ezra 1:5-7 thus foregrounds the shepherd-king ideology of the Mesopotamian building texts, but does so with the emphasis on a democratized portrait of the returnees to Zion.

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검색어

에스라 1

근동

신전 건축 문헌

고레스 원통

고레스 칙령

Revisiting Ezra 1 (vv. 1-4) with the Temple Building Inscriptions of Mesopotamia

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L. S. Fried and others have convincingly demonstrated that the book of Ezra foregrounds the ideology of temple destruction and reconstruction that was shared across the ancient Near East. This article offers further observations based on the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian building texts by tracing the ancient Near Eastern ideology that underlies Ezra 1:1-4, especially with respect to the initiation of the temple rebuilding by a divinely ordained king who is styled as a royal shepherd.

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First, a careful examination of the building inscriptions provides further insights to the peculiar Hebrew idiom in Ezra 1:1 (i.e., *hē'ir*, “stirred up”). In the Mesopotamian analogues, the Akkadian terms *šudkû* and *šutbû* are appropriated to indicate the divinely originated cause in the mytho-historical story of the destruction and restoration of the temple. In Nabonidus’s rebuilding account, both *šudkû* and *šutbû* are used interchangeably in a negative sense, as in “incite” or “arouse.” Remarkably, these verbs were distinctly deployed in the context of the deity’s abandonment of its own temple or the deity’s judgment of the enemy forces linked with the destruction of the temple. In the royal corpus of Nebuchadnezzar II, both *šudkû* and *šutbû* are attested. But the former usage predominates, conveying a positive connotation, as in “prompt” or “motivate.”

Mesopotamian royal annals, inheriting the Sumerian legacy, describe the king as the shepherd of his people, often in combination with depiction of pastoral duties of gathering the scattered people. In the temple building texts of Mesopotamia, the shepherd metaphor is vividly woven into the monarch’s presentation of the renovation project. This idea is also evident in Cyrus’s royal rhetoric employing the Akkadian verb *še’û*, which showcases the sedulous attention of the Mesopotamian monarchs in rectifying cultic and civil aberrations. Rereading of the edict of Cyrus in Ezra 1 in light of such an ideological orientation yields a democratized portrait of the Judean returnees, all of whom play an active role in rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem.

Keywords

Ezra 1

Ancient Near East

Building Texts

Cyrus Cylinder

Edict of Cyrus

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