

מלך אשור “The King of Assyria” in Ezra 6:22

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The completion of the building of the Second Temple that took place in the sixth year of Darius I, King of Persia¹ (Ezra 6:15), was marked by a dedication ceremony which is briefly described in Ezra 6:16–18. One could have expected the same display of joy as occurred at the dedication of the First Temple in the time of Solomon or at least similar to that which took place at the time they laid the foundation of the Temple,² at the festival of Tabernacles or at the time of the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem in the time of Nehemiah.³ The text (Ezra 6:16–18) describes the dedication briefly in a schematic manner which seems to hint that the joy was not complete or that it was very restrained.⁴ However, the reader of Ezra 6:19–22 gains the impression that the narrator wishes to describe a feeling of optimism which was current among the celebrants. This Hebrew⁵ text, which apparently derived from the pen of one who described the dedication of the Temple⁶ reads:

The returned exiles celebrated the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month, for the priests and the Levites had purified themselves to a man; they were all pure. They slaughtered the passover offering for all the returned exiles, and for their brother priests and for themselves. The children of Israel who had returned from the exile, together with all who joined them in separating themselves from the uncleanness of the nations of the lands to

1. On the date of the building of the Temple see M. A. Dandamayev, *A Political History of the Achaemenid Empire*, trans. W. J. Vogelsang (Leiden, 1989), 352.

2. For the dedication of the First Temple, see 1 Kgs. 8:65–66. On laying the foundation of the Temple, see Ezra 3:5–13.

3. On the feast of Tabernacles, see Neh. 8:16–18. The text emphasizes there “that there was a very great rejoicing” (8:17). On the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, see Neh. 12:37–42, esp. v. 43. It should be noted that the word “joy” occurs five times in this verse.

4. The narrator is satisfied merely to note the word *hedwā* and so to describe the feeling of the people at the time of the Temple dedication. It is important to note that in I Esdras 7:5 this phrase is lacking. It is possible that the people were sad and disappointed because they did not see the return of the *Shekinah* to the Temple as it was seen at the dedication of the Tent of Meeting and the First Temple; see S. Hakohen, “The Building of the Second Temple as Reflected in Biblical Sources” (unpublished M.A. Thesis, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, 1975), 138–42. One can likewise posit that the joy of the celebrants was not complete because they were afraid of bloody attacks similar to those that took place at the time of laying the foundation of the Temple; see Ezra 4:1–5.

5. From 4:7 until 6:18 the language of the text is Aramaic.

6. See L. W. Batten, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, ICC (Edinburgh, 1913), 52; J. M. Myers, *I and II Esdras*, AB (Garden City, 1974), 80; D. J. Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, NCBC (Grand Rapids, 1984), 96. For a discussion of the problem of the blending of Hebrew and Aramaic in the Book of Ezra, see D. C. Snell, “Why is there Aramaic in the Bible?” *JSOT* 18 (1980), 32–51.

worship the Lord God of Israel, ate of it. They joyfully celebrated the Feast of the Unleavened bread for seven days, for the Lord had given them cause for joy by inclining the heart of the Assyrian king toward them so as to give them support in the work of the House of God, the God of Israel (Ezra 6:19–22).

Verse 22 begins by recording the fact that the celebrants who ate of the Paschal sacrifice continued to celebrate the Festival of Matzot⁷ for seven days. The narrator was not satisfied merely to record this fact but added that the festival was celebrated “joyfully.” In the passage in the Book of Leviticus the matter of “joy” is mentioned in connection with the Festival of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:40) as well as in Deuteronomy 16:11, 14, in connection with Pentecost and Tabernacles; but nowhere is joy mentioned in connection with Passover. One can therefore understand that by means of this additional word the narrator wanted to emphasize the atmosphere and the feeling that were current among the celebrants. The author does not leave the reader in doubt as to the reason for the joy, but explains that “the Lord had given them cause for joy.” Furthermore, lest the reader think that the joy arose out of the festival of Passover alone, the narrator emphasizes that the joy is a result of the fact that the Lord inclined “the heart of the Assyrian king toward them so as to give them support in the work of the House of God, the God of Israel.”⁸ One may understand that this verse, which concludes the description of the festival of Passover in the new Temple and the history of the returnees from the time of the declaration of Cyrus until the celebration of the festival, contains elements by means of which the author wished to give the reader the feeling of raised spirits and of the hope which suffused the people who returned.

Since historically the building of the Temple and the celebration of the festival of Passover took place in the days of Darius I, the King of Persia, about whom it is said that God “turned his heart towards them to strengthen them in the work of God, the God of Israel,” many scholars have maintained that the term “King of Assyria” mentioned in this verse is a scribal error.⁹ Brockington,¹⁰ for example, maintained that the reason for the error is, “owing to the familiarity of Biblical literature with the phrase ‘king of Assyria’ which occurs some ninety times (although ‘King of Babylon’ is more frequent with one hundred and twenty seven times).” Others maintain that the phrase was used deliberately and is not a mistake.¹¹ Thus Blenkinsopp¹²

7. So it was at the celebration of the Passover in the time of Hezekiah (2 Chr. 30:21). On the link between Passover and the Festival of Maṣṣot see, e.g., Batten, *Ezra*, 95; L. H. Brockington, *Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther* (Greenwood, 1969), 75; F. C. Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (Grand Rapids, 1982), 96.

8. The term “joy” is used to describe the feeling of the celebrants of the Passover in the time of Hezekiah; see 2 Chr. 30:21, 23, 25, 26. This term is not used in the description of the celebration of the Passover in the time of Josiah. For an extended discussion of the term “joy” and its congeners in the available ancient Near Eastern sources, see Y. Muffs, *Love and Joy: Law, Language, and Religion in Ancient Israel* (New York, 1992), 121–38, 184–86.

9. See, e.g., Brockington, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 76; Myers, *Esdra*, 77.

10. *Ibid.*

11. See the various possibilities enumerated by H. E. Ryle, *Ezra and Nehemiah* (Cambridge, 1923), 86. According to R. J. Coggins, *Ezra and Nehemiah* (Cambridge, 1976), 41, it is difficult to know the reason for the change, because the Chronicler does not use the term Assyria as a general term to denote the polytheistic empire as did the author of the Book of Jonah.

12. J. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, OTL (London, 1988), 133.

argues that the kings of Persia were the heirs of the Assyrians so that it is possible to describe Mesopotamia as "Assyria," and that the phrase "King of Assyria" would be understood to mean King of Mesopotamia. In his view it also possible that the phrase "King of Assyria" reflects a later use of the term and refers to the Seleucid empire. Blenkinsopp also proposed other possibilities in the light of parallels between this passage and the story of the Passover of Hezekiah: "The allusion in the latter to the remnant which has escaped from the hand of the king of Assyria (2 Chr. 30:6) may well have been in the writer's mind as he brought his story of the return and restoration to a close."

According to Fensham:¹³

The title "king of Assyria" might not be so far fetched as some scholars believe. We have evidence from the ancient Near East that new rulers or foreign rulers were incorporated in the king list of a particular country. . . . Because Darius was also the sovereign of Assyria, he could easily be called "king of Assyria." The choice of this title might seem awkward. It is possible that the author wanted to refer to a title which had for a long time in history inspired fear in the hearts of the Jews. The Assyrian kings were used by the Lord to chastise his people (Neh. 9:32).

We are of the opinion that the proposal of Fensham, that "the author wanted to refer to a title which had for a long time in history inspired fear in the hearts of the Jews," is the correct explanation. We will try to elaborate on this explanation and propose that the term "King of Assyria" in Ezra 6:22 is a coded term with theological and historical significance by means of which the narrator wished to emphasize the essence and historical importance of the first celebration of the festival of Passover in the Second Temple.

When Darius I took the throne of Persia in 522 B.C.E.,¹⁴ there broke out revolts in various parts of the empire which threatened the very existence of the Persian empire.¹⁵ Darius succeeded in putting down the revolts and acted cruelly against those who were not loyal to him.¹⁶ The Behistun inscription tells of nineteen battles in which more than one hundred thousand rebels were killed.¹⁷ The nations to the west of the Euphrates did not rebel against Darius because the Persians treated them more favorably than did the Egyptians, Assyrians, or Babylonians who ruled over the region at various times.¹⁸ In June 521 B.C.E. Darius succeeded in putting down the major revolts in all parts of the empire.¹⁹ In the early years of his reign Darius maintained the older order of provinces and only later did he reorganize the provincial

13. Fensham, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 96–97.

14. On the accession of Darius, see Dandamayev, *A Political History*, 103.

15. On the revolts against Darius, see, e. g., A. Kuhrt, "Babylonia from Cyrus to Xerxes," in J. Boardman et al., eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1988), 4.129; J. M. Cook, *The Persian Empire* (London, 1988), 58–66.

16. On the cruelty of Darius towards those who were not loyal to him, see T. C. Young, "The Consolidation of the Empire and its Limits of Growth under Darius and Xerxes," in Boardman et al., eds., *Cambridge Ancient History*, 4.65.

17. Kuhrt, *Babylonia*, 130, 133.

18. Dandamayev, *Political History*, 128.

19. Young, *Consolidation*, 57–61, 63–65. On the character of the Persian Empire, see Cook, 67–76. On the provincial organization of the Persian Empire, see Cook, *The Persian Empire*, 77–90; Dandamayev, *Political History*, 517.

structure of the empire. In the framework of this new arrangement one of the main provinces was called “Babylonia and the rest of Aššur” and separated from the province of Beyond the River of which Judea was part. This reform took place between the years 516–502.²⁰ The rule of Darius I was characterized by efficiency. He understood that he could gain the trust and loyalty of his subjects by granting them a certain measure of personal and national freedom.²¹ The success of Darius in putting down the revolts had important consequences for the fate of the Persian Empire:

The accomplishments of Darius' first year, therefore, given his particular power base, might perhaps be viewed as the actual creation, for the first time, of a real empire: a governmental structure based on the army, on certain classes of the society whose loyalty was to the throne and not to some specific geographical region, and on the charisma, intelligence and moral fortitude of one man, Darius I.²²

The Jews apparently did not take part in the rebellion against Darius.²³ However, in the days of this king a great danger hovered over the work of completing the building of the Temple with the arrival of the high level commission led by Tattenai, the governor of the province of Eber-Nahar, to examine the legality of the building (Ezra 5:3–6:12).²⁴ This danger passed only after Tattenai and Darius concluded that there was no need to stop the work of building the Temple. Furthermore, Darius ordered his officials to aid the Jews in the building of their Temple, financed the project, and freed the personnel of the Temple from taxes, thus giving the Jews more than Cyrus had granted them (Ezra 6:6–12). Indeed, following Tattenai's investigation the Temple was completely built within four years. The Jews felt secure in the days of Darius, the mighty king of the Persian Empire, even though in his time the Davidic family lost its leading role with the disappearance of Zerubbabel at an unknown time.

Apparently Darius's attitude toward the God of Israel and His Temple and toward the Temple personnel was similar to that of Cyrus²⁵ toward major temples in the kingdom. But the one who described the first Passover festival in the Second Temple proffers a historiosophic explanation with regard to Darius' favorable attitude toward the national undertaking of the Jews: the Lord inclined his heart toward them—namely, the God of Israel caused Darius to act as he did. The story of Cyrus, the founder of the Persian Empire, in relation to the Jews begins with his decla-

20. Kuhrt, *Babylonia*, 130–31; Dandamayev, *Political History*, 65.

21. In a number of his inscriptions Darius emphasizes that he hates lies, strives for justice and is the representative of Ahura-Mazda. Aeschylus wrote, on the basis of Persian traditions, that people of Persia were not like Darius and compares him to a god. According to Plato, Cyrus gave his subjects a great measure of freedom, but Cambyses stopped it. During the course of his reign Darius restored freedom to the Persians and acted friendly towards people; see Kuhrt, *Babylonia*, 130–31.

22. Young, *Consolidation*, 63.

23. For a discussion and different views, see Dandamayev, *Political History*, 127–28.

24. On this investigation, see our study, “The Investigation Commission of Tattenai: The Purpose of the Investigation and its Results,” *HUCA* 66 (1995), 81–102.

25. Apparently the Jews in the province of Beyond the River did not receive preferential treatment but were treated like all the other ethnic groups in this province; see I. Eph'al, “Syria-Palestine under Achaemenid rule,” in Boardman et al., eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 4.151.

ration, which was given because the Lord “roused” the spirit of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1). The circle is now closed with the historiosophic declaration that the Lord inclined his heart toward them. In the words of Blenkinsopp: “But now the Lord had used the Assyrian king (Darius) to grant favor to the Jews, a great change in the historical situation.”²⁶

This verse expresses a well known Biblical religious approach: the Lord is supreme and even the greatest kings are subject to His authority. The Lord is the master of history and through historical processes His will becomes clear to those who believe in Him.²⁷ We wish to propose that by means of the phrase “King of Assyria” the narrator hints at a broader historical cycle than that of the days of the Persian Empire and the attitude of the Persian kings to the returnees to Zion. This broader cycle consists of a period that includes the events of Israelite history from the conquest of the kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians until the building of the Second Temple and the first Passover festival in the days of Darius I, King of Persia.

The national catastrophe that Israel endured in the days of the Assyrian Empire did not cease nor was it forgotten in the consciousness of the returnees to Zion. It was remembered as the period in which the nation of Israel was subjugated. Thus Nehemiah concludes his “great confession”: “And now, our God, great, mighty, and awesome God, Who stays faithful to His covenant, do not treat lightly all the suffering that has overtaken us—our kings, our officers, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and all Your people—from the time of the Assyrian kings to this day” (Neh. 9:32). It is possible to deduce from the prayer of Nehemiah two important things relevant to our theme: first, the difficult situation of the returnees to Zion²⁸ in his day, whose “suffering”²⁹ begins with the days of Assyrian hegemony over the kingdom of Israel and is followed by Judah becoming a vassal of Assyria.³⁰ Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, increased the national catastrophe of Israel when he conquered Judah and exiled its inhabitants. After the destruction of Judah and the Temple in 586 B.C.E., the majority of both parts of Israel were in exile. This same situation is described in Jeremiah: “Israel are scattered sheep, harried by lions. First the *king of Assyria* devoured them, and in the end King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon crunched their bones” (Jer. 5:17).

Second, the period from the “king of Assyria until this day” is considered essentially as a unity.³¹ We wish to propose that the expression “King of Assyria” in

26. 133.

27. See, e.g., Isa. 47:5–6; Jer. 50:17–20; Zech. 10:8–12.

28. We accept the view of Batten, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 163, that the list of the sufferers had as its aim the desire to emphasize the suffering of all sectors of society.

29. The word לְתַלְאֵה is a technical term that expresses difficulties such as those that befell Israel in Egypt and in the wanderings in the desert (Exod. 18:6; Num. 20:14); see Batten *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 363; Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 293.

30. P. Machinist, “Assyria and its Image in the First Isaiah,” *JAOS* 103 (1983), 740; I. Eph'al, “Israel: Fall and Exile,” in A. Malamat, ed., *The Age of the Monarchies: Political History* (Jerusalem, 1979), 180–91, esp. 188–91.

The term “King of Assyria” in Nehemiah alludes to the following rulers of Assyria: Tiglath-Pileser III; Shalmaneser, Sargon II, and especially Sennacherib and apparently also Esarhaddon (Ezra 4:1–2) as well as Ashurbanipal (Osnappar in Ezra 4:9–10).

31. Coggins, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 118.

Ezra 6:22 is not a historical description of the king of Persia³² but a metonymic expression whose aim is to serve as title. The reasons for this coding are two: 1) the image of the Assyrian Empire in the historical consciousness and memory of the Israelites; 2) the results of the conquest of Israel by Assyria in the eighth century were liable to cause the failure of the returnees to Zion to once again take hold of their country and rebuild their Temple. It thus served to focus the attention of the reader on the national-historical memory and to the present situation of Israel. We will now try to explicate our thesis.

The image of the Assyrian Empire is drawn in many verses, some of which are from the period of the Assyrian invasion of the Land of Israel while others are of a later date. We will refer here to two elements of importance for our purpose: Assyrian imperialism and the military capability of the Assyrian Empire. The imperialistic drive of the Assyrians finds expression in the following words of Isaiah:

But when my Lord has carried out all his purpose on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, He will punish the majestic pride and overbearing arrogance of the king of Assyria. For he thought, By the might of my hand have I wrought it, By my skill, for I am clever; I have erased the borders of peoples; I have plundered their treasures, And exiled their vast populations. I was able to seize, like a nest, the wealth of peoples; As one gathers abandoned eggs, So I gathered all the earth; Nothing so much as flapped a wing Or opened a mouth to peep (Isa. 10:12–14).

The nature and strength of the Assyrian army which threatened Judah can be seen in the words of the prophet:

Because that people has spurned
The gently flowing waters of Siloam—
Assuredly
My Lord will bring up against them
The mighty, massive waters of the Euphrates,
The king of Assyria and all his multitude.
It shall rise above all its channels
And flow over all its beds,
And swirl through Judah like a flash flood
Reaching up to the neck.
But with us is God, Whose wings are spread
As wide as your land is broad! (Isa. 8:6–8)³³

The image of Assyria in Isaiah was well described by Machinist in the following words: “It is that of an overwhelming military machine, destroying all resistance

32. The titles of the kings in the ancient Near East had great significance, and scribes used to describe the kings with different titles according to the different situations. See, e.g., Dandamayev, *Political History*, 55 n. 9; P. Briant, *Histoire de l'Empire Perse* (Paris, 1996), 54, 101–3, 194, 922.

33. For the total notices of Assyria in the Bible, see Machinist, “Assyria and Its Image,” 719–20, n. 1.

in its path, devastating the land of its enemies, hauling away huge numbers of spoils and captives to its capital or elsewhere in the realm rearranging by this devastation and deportation the political physiognomy of the entire region."³⁴ Machinist has shown³⁵ that the source of Isaiah's knowledge about the Assyrians is not only practical experience but also his familiarity with Assyrian literature, mainly the court propaganda literature,³⁶ and this had its influence in later times: "The Assyrian propaganda . . . and the reaction to it of Isaiah and his circle did not die with the latter, but became part of Biblical tradition, shaping responses to subsequent events even as it was invigorated by continuing contact with Mesopotamia."³⁷

We can summarize the subject of the image of Assyria among the Israelites in the words of Oppenheim: "The terrifying mask (of Assyria) that was deliberately turned toward the outside world was undeniably effective. The Old Testament reflects in numerous poignant passages the fear inspired by Assyrian military might and by the ruthless aggressiveness directed against all those nations that found themselves in the path of Assyrian expansion."³⁸

The Assyrian conquest of Israel had serious consequences even later in the period of the return to Zion. The kings of Assyria who conquered the kingdom of Samaria and exiled a large part of its population, brought about the demise of the northern kingdom. The two-way system of exile which the Assyrians employed³⁹ did not leave Samaria unpopulated: "The king of Assyria brought [people] from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and he settled them in the towns of Samaria in place of the Israelites; they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its towns" (2 Kgs. 17:24). The exile of the Israelites together with the settlement of other nations in Samaria by the king of Assyria in the eighth century B.C.E. had direct repercussions on the returnees to Zion in general and on the building of the Temple in particular as a brief survey of events described in Ezra 1–6 shows.⁴⁰ The returnees led by Sheshbazzar tried to renew the cult at the Temple site already in the first year of their return to Jerusalem. They thus built an altar:

And they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, burnt offerings each morning and evening. Then they celebrated the festival of Tabernacles as is written, with its daily burnt offerings in

34. *Ibid.*, 723–24 and n. 14.

35. *Ibid.*, 729.

36. Propaganda played an important role in the spread of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. For examples of this propaganda and its diffusion into Judah, see Machinist, "Assyria and Its Image," 729–31 and nn. 56–58. The means of writing were different, but one attractive form was the royal stele and reliefs that were set up by the kings of Assyria in all parts of their empire, both vassal kingdoms and annexed provinces. Such steles have been found in Samaria and Ashdod, but not in Judah proper. However, one cannot deny the possibility that such steles were also set up there.

37. Machinist, "Assyria and Its Image," 735.

38. A. L. Oppenheim, "Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Empires," in H. D. Lasswell et al., eds., *Propaganda and Communication in World History, I: The Symbolic Instrument in Early Times* (Honolulu, 1979), 133–34.

39. On the Assyrian Exile and the methods of exile, see, e.g., I. Eph'al, "Israel," 180–91; A. Malamat, "The Wars of Israel and Assyria," in J. Liver, ed., *The Military History of Israel in Biblical Times* (Tel-Aviv, 1968), 241–60 [in Hebrew].

40. S. Talmon, *King, Cult and Calendar in Ancient Israel* (Jerusalem, 1986), 165–201.

the proper quantities, on each day as is prescribed for it, followed by the regular burnt offering and the offerings for the new moons and for all the sacred fixed times of the Lord and whatever freewill offerings were made to the Lord. From the first day of the seventh month they began to make burnt offerings to the Lord, though the foundations of the Temple of the Lord had not been laid (Ezra 2:3–6).⁴¹

The altar was built on the foundations of the altar of Solomon. The returnees apparently tore down the existing altar in order to build a new one in its place. This act aroused the enmity of the “peoples of the land” who apparently were the older inhabitants of the land of Judah and Samaria,⁴² or foreign peoples who settled in various districts of Judah.⁴³

Laying the foundation of the Temple in the second year as described in Ezra 2:5–13 was an event of great importance because it was the first stage in the building of the Second Temple. But the hope of the returnees that they would succeed building a Temple in a short period of time was disappointed because of the opposition of the “adversaries of Judah and Benjamin,” namely the people settled in the land by the king of Assyria.⁴⁴ They heard “that the returned exiles were building a Temple to the Lord God of Israel, they approached Zerubbabel and the chiefs of the clans and said to them, ‘Let us build with you, since we too worship your God, having offered sacrifices to Him since the time of King Esarhaddon of Assyria who brought us here.’”

The response of the leaders of the returnees to the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin, who identified themselves as descendants of foreigners who were forcibly resettled in Samaria after the annexation of the north to the Assyrian Empire⁴⁵ was explicit: “It is not for you and us to build a House to our God, but we alone will build it to the Lord God of Israel, in accord with the charge that the king, King Cyrus of Persia laid upon us” (Ezra 4:3). This refusal resulted in great enmity between the returnees and the adversaries of Judah which resulted, according to Ezra 4:4–5, in the cessation of the building of the Temple until the second year of Darius I, in 421 B.C.E.

It is almost certain that the many difficulties faced by the returnees, beginning in the first year of their return from exile, raised a difficult question: can this broken, wounded nation return to live a religious-national life in its homeland from which it was forcibly exiled beginning in the days of the kings of Assyria? From a rational-realistic viewpoint the answer must be negative. But not so from an ideological-theological standpoint. God promised through His prophets that after the destruction and exile there will come a national restoration. The first six chapters of Ezra, mainly the verses in Ezra 6:19–22, propose to show that this promise was indeed

41. The renewal of the daily burnt offerings was of great importance. This sacrifice serves as a metonym for the entire sacrificial system; see Blenkinsopp, 98.

42. Fensham, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 97.

43. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 97.

44. See, e.g., Fensham, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 66.

45. The deportations in the days of Esarhaddon 681–669, are apparently linked to the wars in Syria in 677/676 B.C.E. It should be noted that the Aramaic source in Ezra 4:10 relates to the settling of foreigners in Samaria in the days of Ashurbanipal; cf. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 107; Fensham, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 67–68.

fulfilled: the Jews returned to their land, the temple was built, and the cult was renewed at Passover festival, whose theme is national-religious freedom. Finally, they overcame the difficulties which the kings of Assyria had caused because "God inclined the heart of the King of Assyria," namely the king of Persia, the heirs of the Assyrians, who sought their good and helped them to restore their Temple and even restore (partially) their national pride. Therefore, one can say that the metonymic phrase "King of Assyria" in Ezra 6:22 is a coded term. It is a literary didactic ploy by which the narrator wished to make the reader think and contemplate the history of Israel from the days of the kings of Assyria until the days of their heir, Darius I, as well as to examine the contrary policy of the rulers of the Persian Empire and, even more, the Lord God of Israel who motivated these kings.