
This is a slightly revised version of the author’s Habilitationsschrift, which was accepted by the evangelical faculty of the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität in Bonn in 2002/2003.

Grätz concludes that the sequence of passages in 1 Esdras, except for the parallels to 2 Chronicles 35-36 and the story of the three pages, is more original than Ezra MT and Nehemiah 8. He notes that a diarchic form of government exists in Ezra 1-6, but no governmental figure stands alongside Ezra in Ezra 7-10. Hence, Ezra 7-10 and Nehemiah 8 were composed in reaction to Ezra 1-6. The separate approaches to mixed marriages in Ezra 9-10 and Nehemiah 13 show that they belong to distinct traditions, and Nehemiah 1-6, 12-13 were linked secondarily to Ezra 1-10 and Nehemiah 8, probably in Maccabean times.

After a detailed philological study of the decree of Artaxerxes in Ezra 7, 12-26, he examines the trilingual stele from Letoon and concludes, against Peter Frei, that it did not give Persian authorization to local laws and does not provide an appropriate analogy for the authorization of the Pentateuch. The letter or decree of Artaxerxes can be classified with the donations to cults associated with Hellenistic kings and has been projected back into the Persian period. He finds an analogy in the letter of Antiochus III to the city and temple in Jerusalem that is preserved in Josephus and believes that the letter of Darius to Tattenai in Ezra 6, 6-12 is of the same genre. On the basis of this form critical and sociological analysis he concludes that the decree of Artaxerxes is not a historical
document from the mid fifth century, but rather was composed in early Ptolemaic times, a century and a half later.

Yehud in his view was a semi-autonomous province in Persian times, and the Persians themselves were reluctant to interfere in local cultic affairs. Yehud’s territory covered only 1900 square kilometers, and its population, following Charles Carter, was 13,350 before 450 and only 20,560 thereafter.

While Ezra 1-6 defines membership in the community according to the list of returnees in Ezra 1-6, the Ezra story points out how some people are disqualified from membership by their marital status. Later, Nehemiah shows concern that some members of the community can no longer speak the Hebrew language. The purpose of the Ezra story is to put into effect and teach the law throughout the Trans-Euphrates territory, and not just in Yehud. From the perspective of Babylonian Judaism Yehud was part of the diaspora.

Dating the decree of Artaxerxes to Ptolemaic times is based on four criteria: the genre of royal donations to cults in Hellenistic times; David’s lavish gifts to the temple in 1 Chronicles 29, which is also assigned to a Hellenistic context, the citation of “authentic” documents in the book of Ezra, which is common in Hellenistic historiography, and the lack of epigraphic parallels to the decree of Artaxerxes in Achaemenid times. The focus on the entire area west of the Euphrates probably reflects the inclusion of Yehud within the territory of Phoenicia and Syria taken over by Ptolemy I in 305.

In the late nineteenth century Eduard Meyer argued that the decree of Artaxerxes in Ezra was historical but had been redacted by a Jewish functionary in the imperial
service, perhaps by Ezra himself. Subsequent discussion has often concluded that the major provisions of the decree are congruent with Persian imperial policy toward local cults. Two recent statements set the parameters for the debate. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988) 147, states: “The mission of Ezra…is certainly historical. The purpose of the mission, as mandated in an imperial firman, was to restore the Jerusalem cultus and put the administration of the Jewish law on a firm basis….With or without editorial retouching, the decree was incorporated into Ezra’s personal account of his tour of duty….” Lester L. Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period*. Volume 1 Yehud: A History of the Persian Province of Judah (Library of Second Temple Studies 47; London: T & T Clark International, 2004), who is highly skeptical about the Ezra traditions, concludes, 342-343: “[The decree of Artaxerxes] is not the product of the Achaemenid age….It could be an outright invention, though there could have been an actual decree of Artaxerxes lying behind Ezra 7. If so, this decree has been worked over by Jewish scribes of a later age to produce the present text which in no way came from Artaxerxes….The view that an individual named Ezra existed and had something to do with the promulgation of a new lawbook is a perfectly reasonable one.” While Grabbe objects to the excessive powers and overwhelming sums of money given to Ezra in the decree, he retains the possibility of an historical Ezra who was involved with a lawbook.

Two questions make it difficult to accept the conclusions of Grätz without qualification. Are the parallels with royal Hellenistic donations close enough to preclude similar actions under Persian hegemony? And, more importantly, is Grätz correct in denying in general Persian support for or involvement with local cultic affairs? The
Elephantine papyri, the Udjahorresnet inscription, and the Letoon trilingual, while discussed by him and while falling far short of the powers and funds given to Ezra in the decree of Artaxerxes, do show Persian activity in the cultic area. To claim that Cambyses in his actions in Egypt was acting as an Egyptian Pharaoh and not as the Persian emperor seems to be desperation. But there is much to be learned from this book, and its evidence and arguments will be part of the discussion for years to come.

1100 E. 55th Street

Chicago, IL 60615

Ralph W. Klein