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Yaacov Shavit

## **Cyrus King of Persia and the Return to Zion: A Case of Neglected Memory<sup>1</sup>**

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*Then we began to examine the plan for the building of the [Jewish] state.*

*"I would believe in it," I said to Herzl, "if what happened before the building of the second Jewish state [the Return to Zion] were to happen."*

*"What happened then?" asked Herzl curiously.*

*"Then Zerubabel roused the Jews to return to their ancient homeland. Zerubabel also exists today – that's you, Doctor, but then – and this is more important – there was Cyrus, who supported Zerubabel's enterprise with his universal force. Is there such a Cyrus today?" ...*

*Zerubabel [Herzl] bent his head and whispered in my ear – so the English guests who had just arrived would not hear: "Who knows, maybe there already is a Cyrus."*

Miksa Szabolci, "Conversations with Dr. Herzl," 1903

### **I**

According to Bernard Lewis, new nations which have forgotten most of their history turn to the past to reveal it, reconstruct it and grant it a symbolic and creative function in the national consciousness. To buttress this claim, he cites the "Cyrus Ritual" in Persia (Iran) of the Pahlavi dynasty and the "Masada Ritual" in Israel as representative and prominent examples. In Persia, Cyrus became the image of a founding father, while in Israel, the Herodian fortress at Masada attained the status of a heroic site of a symbolic nature. The two cases are similar since the memory of Cyrus is preserved primarily by Greek and Jewish historiography, while that of Masada is preserved primarily by the Jewish historian Josephus

Flavius, usually regarded by Jews with disfavor, whose historical writings were aimed at the educated Roman reader. In both cases, historical consciousness turned to foreign sources to discover the past it needed and which it itself had consigned to oblivion.

The distinction between these two cases of "recovery of the past" and "invention of tradition" is ironic, as Lewis emphasizes: the Persians chose the myth of a *beginning*, for Cyrus not only changed the world order in the ancient East but was also considered to be the founder of a new nation. Jewish nationalists, on the other hand, chose the myth of an *end*, for Masada symbolizes a heroic war that ended in destruction and exile, and thereby, according to Lewis, they exposed some profound facet of their soul: after the Destruction, Jewish tradition forgot or repressed the story of Masada out of a "healthy instinct"; now, paradoxically, an emerging national society has rediscovered this event and turned it into the central stratum of its group consciousness.<sup>2</sup> However, it would, perhaps, have been more appropriate for the new Jewish nation also to have chosen Cyrus to embody a historical tale of origins, and not the Masada myth, since Cyrus was a "founding father" for Israel as well. If this is so, how can we explain the fact that Cyrus and the "Return to Zion" he made possible have not acquired a fitting place in the collective memory of the Jewish people?

Indeed, as I shall argue in this essay, Cyrus's role in Jewish history has been relegated to the margins of the Jewish historical memory and he has not been accorded the status and honor he deserves. His appearance on the stage of history and the permission he granted the Jews to return from their exile in Babylon and build the Second Temple have not attained a symbolic status or been commemorated in any official way and have played practically no role in the creation of Jewish historical consciousness. This argument might justly be regarded as puzzling or invalid, since the story of the "Cyrus Declaration" has been preserved in the official "national memory" in various forms. It is recounted in Ezra and Nehemia, in the later Prophets as well as in the historical writings of the Second Temple, the book of *Josippon* and the

Talmudic Midrashim. Moreover, all historical writing on that period during the past two hundred years refers to the declaration positively and admiringly. It would seem, therefore, that the memory of the declaration was never forgotten and that the new national historiography had no need to rediscover it: Jews did not need Greek historical writings to learn about Cyrus since he had always been part of their history. If this is so, how can it be argued that Cyrus and the Cyrus Declaration are neglected items of Jewish historical memory?

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This paradox can be elucidated by considering the nature of "historical memory" and its affinities and relations with "historical writing." In general, the various modes of historical writing, including historiography, are not the primary textual embodiment of "historical memory" or even its sole source. The central position of historiography in creating images of the past and historical constructs and in forming the repertoire of paradigmatic and analogic examples in the last two hundred years should not mislead us with regard to former generations. The fact that our knowledge about many periods in the past comes from historical writing does not prove that those previous generations knew about their past from the same writings. Josephus, for example, was known only to a handful of Jews, and he was not the source for the Jews' knowledge about the Second Temple or the ancient history of their nation. As for earlier generations, historical writings from the Biblical period were the property of a relatively small group of readers. If the lost books were found, we would know what the royal scribes wrote, not what the "nation" knew and remembered.

In fact, we do not know what a Jew of the Second Temple period knew about his near and distant past and from what historical writings and traditions he derived his knowledge – which was certainly not complete. Greeks apparently knew more about their past from the speeches of rhetoricians who used historical examples than from regular history books;<sup>3</sup> and only in the Hellenistic period did historiography turn into a widespread literary genre. Historical writing from these ancient periods cannot teach much about the state of

knowledge about the past at that time or the relationship of the society as a whole to its past.

In the case of Cyrus, except for references to him in historical literature and various legends, neither his name nor his deeds are preserved in the "collective memory" in any other way (not even in Hebrew first names as was Alexander of Macedonia)<sup>4</sup>: no coins or stamps immortalize him, no popular legends or songs are devoted to him, there are no sites connected with his name, no ceremonies commemorate him on any public holiday.<sup>5</sup> Thus, although his name is indeed retained in canonic historical memory, has never been forgotten or repressed, it has also never moved to a central position. The important question, therefore, is not whether Cyrus was an "available past" but whether historical memory used this available knowledge supplied by historical writing to turn Cyrus into practical knowledge or "practical past," into a paradigm, a model, an image of a formative historical event.

The preservation of "historical fact" in writing can of course have value for generations to come – even in the distant future – who can discover and use it whenever they need it; but meanwhile, until it finds a "use," the knowledge is passive knowledge and the fact is a passive fact. Hence the question is when, in what circumstances and in response to what needs does a historical fact become a practical one; and when does a historical event become a paradigmatic event, singled out by historical consciousness and endowed with validity and status by the "historical language"?

The "Cyrus case" is a fascinating and illustrative case study of how available knowledge can, under certain circumstances, turn into practical knowledge, and how a historical fact preserved in passive memory can be transformed into an important item of active historical memory, since it is not a peripheral or secondary event whose importance historical memory has no real reason to emphasize or enhance. The opposite is true. To some extent, it is similar to the Exodus from Egypt whose formative and active place in the religious and historical consciousness of the Jewish people needs no discussion.<sup>6</sup> It can even be argued that the Exodus from Egypt attained its formative status in the history of the Jewish

people primarily after the Return to Zion, which was presented as parallel and similar to it. Those who returned to Zion interpreted the events of their own time by analogy with the earlier event and even described their own Return to Zion as the more miraculous event. But even they did not celebrate the day when the King of Persia issued his proclamation or other formative events in the history of the Return to Zion; they did not write a scroll or legends about the Return to Zion or erect monuments for public commemoration. The same is true of modern Jewish history. Everyone "knows" about the Return to Zion: it is in the textbooks, in historical novels, etc., but it is not commemorated in any way in the collective consciousness. None of the organs of the "institutionalization of memory" has selected this particular event from the long history of the Jewish people in order to underscore its formative status in that history.

The secondary and neglected position of a formative historical event such as the Cyrus Declaration is all the more remarkable since the contemporary prophets granted Cyrus a sublime status. Indeed, the Declaration was the only messianic event in the history of Israel which can be termed a real historical messianic event: it effected and inaugurated a long period in the history of the Jewish people and, in fact, enabled the Jewish people to return to history. The Cyrus Declaration initiated the Return to Zion and thus lies at the very heart of the "pattern of repetition" of the history of the Jewish people, which in turn forms the core of the Jewish historical messianic-restorative-realistic consciousness.<sup>7</sup> According to this model, the Return to Zion is simply a repetition, even a reproduction, of the Exodus from Egypt; similarly, the hopes for redemption after the destruction of the Second Temple interpreted the future in images of the repetition of the first or second redemption. Jews regarded the past not quite as a chain of paradigmatic or exemplary events but as one complete entity which was to repeat itself. The future was to be a re-creation of the past.<sup>8</sup>

The Return to Zion was the outstanding model of this re-creation of the past. Thus it was understood by

contemporaries and thus it was immortalized in historical writing. Its strength lay in its being a second re-creation and a symbol of a third creation. It was a restorative event which assumed the significance of a messianic beginning filled with great expectations. This theme of repetition was taken up briefly at the end of the nineteenth century when the early Zionists, members of the Hibbat Zion (Love of Zion) movement, found many analogies between their period and situation and the period of the Return to Zion. Not only did the "historical repetition" begin to be realized from 1882 for a third time, but the different features of the modern period appeared superficially similar to those of the earlier Return to Zion. Historical repetition resembles not only a return based on the pattern of the formative event, the frame event, but also a restoration of various aspects which are again internalized in reality: in this case, the tension between an isolationist, nationalist outlook and a universalist perspective; the struggle with the "people of the land" (the Arabs) who opposed the national revival; and the relationship between those who returned to Zion and those who remained in Exile. Indeed, as we shall see, the analogous position of the Return to Zion was nourished and supported by these similarities. The periods were parallel both as a historical unit within the framework of a trans-temporal model and as a complex of components as well.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, neither the Return to Zion nor the Cyrus Declaration which inaugurated it achieved a prominent position in the active historical memory, and only during the brief period of Hibbat Zion did they serve as an active, that is, a "useful," past. This, therefore, is an exemplary case of a striking difference between the importance of a unique, formative, even "messianic," event at the time it occurred, in the consciousness of its contemporaries, and in Jewish history, on the one hand, and the status it achieved in historical writing throughout the ages and in the formative, organized Jewish historical memory through the various "agents of memory," on the other.

## II

Before we consider the case of Cyrus in more detail, the distinction between "historical memory" and "historical writing" and historiography should be examined. We have already argued that historiography, the systematic writing of history, aware of itself and its rules, does not necessarily embody collective historical memory. Often it is the creation and property of a relatively small group of writers and readers. It is only in the last two hundred years that historiography has been mobilized to create a consciousness of the past and an official collective historical memory. In any case, only a limited selection from the plethora of historiographic texts becomes "texts in culture," i.e., texts in which the pictures of the past that are drawn, the historical claims that are made, the figures that appear are internalized in the collective consciousness and serve to form and translate reality. In general, historical memory must necessarily be fastidious and the historical past in it must be organized in ways that are completely different from the way the past is created in various modes of historiography. The difference is not only in the historical approach (or attitude to history) or in the fact that historiography is critical and precise while the historical memory is selective and tends to metaphor and myth, but also that historical memory must focus on general arguments and unambiguous statements, on focused pictures of the past and clear images, while historiography is narrative and analytic.

Hence, the function of historiography as a "text in culture" is to serve the historical memory by supplying it with new knowledge, exegesis and images that it can use for its various needs. This is the essential and multifaceted relationship between historiography and the "collective memory." There is historical writing that is aware of this issue and consciously endeavors to influence the "historical memory." It supplies the historical consciousness with arguments about sequence, affiliation, origin, rights, etc., as well as ad hoc instructions, lessons and examples. It scans history for dramatic events embodying basic principles and conveying a trans-temporal message to create collective and accepted pictures of the past



– the “historical myth.”<sup>10</sup> Another kind of history, “academic” history, indirectly and even unwittingly provides historical facts and images of the past which are internalized into society’s consciousness of the past, thus becoming a “useful past.”

58 Historiography is therefore only one form of texts in a culture which are concerned with the past. Other forms of historical writing can also be important sources of historical knowledge and valuable forms of relating to history and may have even greater influence on the shaping of historical reality. Indeed, at least until the modern age it was not historiography, in the modern sense, which was the dominant source of knowledge or determinant of the culture’s image of the past, but rather other forms of historical writing.

During the Age of Enlightenment, historians who were well aware of the nature of their scientific occupation with the past distinguished carefully between historical memory or historical writing on the one hand and the new scientific discipline of history on the other. For the Enlightenment in the West, history was merely an enormous reservoir of examples illustrating and embodying abstract principles.<sup>11</sup> For the historians of the *Aufklärung* in Germany, historiography was distinguished from memory not in the breadth of its knowledge and interest but in the system of description and analysis of the facts in the sequence of time, as stated by Johann Lorenz von Mosheim in his 1755 book, *Ecclesiastical History*:

A bare recital of facts can at best enrich the memory, and furnish a certain degree of amusement; but the historian who enters the secret springs that direct the course of outward events, and views things in their various relations, connexions and tendencies, gives thus a proper exercise to the judgement of the reader....<sup>12</sup>

“Pragmatic history,” according to these historians, researches the internal and external causes and processes of time and place and is not concerned with the clarification of formative events, with transforming them into myths or paradigms or

with isolating universal laws and basic principles to explain and represent events. Thus, in fact, they followed the Greek understanding of the past, using examples from the past, but not out of a belief that history repeats itself. Rhetoricians used historical examples primarily for rhetorics and poetics, as historical parables with a measure of influence on the audience, not as analogies with a metahistorical validity.

Thucydides clearly stated that a tale of events is not myth, but is useful in that it can teach what will happen someday. He did not mean that historical knowledge allows us to predict the future but only that such knowledge can help understand what happened – *post factum*.<sup>13</sup> Events can be similar or identical, but this fundamental resemblance, inherent in factors immanent in human nature, does not grant the power of prophecy and certainly does not imply the “return of history.” That, however, is what human beings seek in history, as Jakob Burckhardt wrote:

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The saying “*historia vitae magistra*” ... assumes at the same time an even loftier and a more modest significance. Since, more than we want experience to make us smarter (for the next time), we want it to make us wiser (forever).<sup>14</sup>

And he, of course, is very skeptical about such a possibility.

Thus, historiography (and other kinds of historical writing as well) is subordinate to the rules of understanding and reasoning which are fundamentally different from the collective historical memory. There is no history without memory, but memory has different meanings, different modes of organization and different functions in society and culture. The way the collective memory functions and organizes the past distinguishes it clearly from historiography, which sometimes (not always) has complex and dynamic relations with it.

When we talk about “historical memory,” we often imply some metaphysical entity, the memory not of an organized, synchronic and diachronic sequence of events and phenomena, but of a selected and intensified series of

formative events with a symbolic or representative status. Society cannot remember "everything" and not every historical fact can have an equal status, value or function. Thus, the history of culture is a dynamic process of selection and preference, reflecting its nature and proclivity. This kind of "historical memory" undoubtedly unites societies, endowing them with a common consciousness and common objectives. It is not merely an embellishment or a repertoire of examples serving to demonstrate principles or rules. On the contrary, it is often described correctly as a central and vital expression of the character of the collective, the embodiment of its "inner spirit," which reads the past and turns it into the present, into functioning "now." Memory is understood as the storehouse of society's dreams, expectations, disappointments, and fears. But this concept of memory is concerned with metahistory, not with history, and is on a par with such vague concepts as "historical judgment" or "historical justice." Hence, research into historical memory as a branch of cultural research or research into the collective mentality necessitates elucidating the nature of the organization of the past in memory, the nature of the memory agents and how they operate, and the modes of functioning of memory in culture. There is therefore a need for a typology (classification and categorization) of the various forms of memory by nature and function.

Culture can also be defined as a reservoir of various kinds of memories and knowledge which are stored by the different memory agents and change their place in the hierarchy, their value and function from time to time. Not every form of organization of memory has the same value, the same function, the same status, and certainly not the same influence. Monuments, for example, the outstanding tangible embodiment of memory, are commemorative sites which isolate out of time and space a place representing a historical event. The selection of the place, the event and the nature of the monument indicates, of course, the nature of the relationship of the selecting culture to history and its system of symbols. It would, however, be difficult to prove that those who visit the site also absorb its message and shape their

historical concepts (and their political behavior) accordingly. Often, the tangible memory only confirms a previous fundamental position, endowing it with a necessary measure of personification. In other words, it is not enough to detail the repertoire of historical memory (belles-lettres, ceremonies, holidays, monuments, landmarks, etc.), just as it is not enough to survey various historical opinions which are publicly expressed by historians, politicians, educators, etc. Such surveys merely demonstrate what available historical material was chosen to be a "practical past" and for what needs. They indicate the status of the memory agents, but, as we said, it is necessary to prove that this "memory" was indeed influential, that the message conveyed was not a passive memory but had turned into an active memory, a memory that is not a liturgical or rhetorical element but an element determining the norms of conduct and shaping the modes of decision and behavior.

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In short, an active historical memory is that repertoire of historical facts used by society and culture not only to preserve the past but also to make the past present and functioning in the culture. Schematically, the planes of functioning can be divided into two. The first is the *thematic plane*: here the memory agent appeals to the past, consciously and deliberately, either to present a full picture of the past and its exegesis – which is a system of organic or circumstantial historical sequence, a system of justifications, assertions, etc. – or to create a system of models, metaphors, symbols and images which use historical events to illustrate principles, values, and arguments, with regard to historical behavior. The second is the *poetic plane*: here historical symbols, images and allusions play a role in communication. They convey various messages economically and effectively within the cultural framework, which has an accepted and common "historical language." Indeed, the historical facts serve as signals for communication.<sup>15</sup> On the first plane it is possible to use complex arguments, to explain a broad historical picture (in fact to write historical exegesis), and to speak in principles. On the second plane, it is necessary to isolate selected components in order to use them. Every culture and every

group in a culture has such a system of historical signs that it uses to convey messages among its members. I would argue that *texts* of a thematic and poetic nature contain the most intensive and influential expression of the "active historical memory."

### III

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The concept of "Return to Zion" in Jewish consciousness is a formative historical symbol on both the thematic and poetic planes, but one that has not been institutionalized within the national culture. Hence, we find it internalized in historical consciousness but we do not find it *used* by this consciousness directly and openly, either on the thematic or on the poetic plane. Since it has no sign outside the defined corpus of texts, its place in historical memory and its active function can be examined empirically only by means of those texts that deal with it directly and use it for various purposes. Again, the fact that it is in a generally familiar text (the Bible) is not evidence of how it has been absorbed into the collective memory and certainly not of the way it has been used. To prove that we are talking about *active memory*, we must find that the period or the event that initiates it, the Cyrus Declaration, has been mentioned throughout the generations repeatedly in various ways for various purposes. However, as we have seen, it was mentioned rarely and appeared actively only during a brief period in Jewish history.

Why was this key event so neglected and consigned to the periphery of the active historical memory? And why did it emerge and function with such intensity in a limited period and then retreat once more to the margins of memory, reverting to the status of a passive memory? Why did this intensive emergence fail to transform the Return to Zion as a whole, and the Cyrus Declaration within it, into a valuable part of the historical tradition or into a desirable historical paradigm?

Not many would question that the Cyrus Declaration of 536 B.C.E. is a historical fact, especially since the discovery of the Cyrus Cylinder (the Babylonian writing on a clay tablet) in

1879 and its historical semantic analysis, which shed light on the historical background of the permission granted the Jews to immigrate to Eretz Israel and rebuild the Temple as well as a community with all its institutions.<sup>16</sup> The second Isaiah, as we know, grants Cyrus the lofty title of messiah: "That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd and shall perform all my pleasure" (Isaiah 44:28); and "Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; I will loose the loins of kings" (Isaiah 45:1). In this late prophecy the foreign king Cyrus is accorded a status unparalleled in the history of Israel or human history in general. However, although the Persian period lasted about two hundred years and although the Cyrus Declaration was a formative historical event certainly preserved in the "living" historical memory of later generations, one that was miraculous but nonetheless historical in time and place, a human act with far-reaching results, the literature of the period after the composition of the Book of Chronicles, during the time of the Second Temple (including the Apocrypha), contains little historical information about the Return to Zion.<sup>17</sup>

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The literature of the Sages contains mainly historiosophic evidence of the period, but no history of it. The explanation sometimes given for this conspicuous omission is the meager impression left by the period on the "historical experience" of the Jewish people. The explanation seems tenuous since "historical experience" is a vague and flimsy concept and it is difficult, as we said, to understand how such an event could have left a "meager impression." It seems more reasonable to attribute this neglect to the fact that the Sages were primarily concerned with issues of chronography, as was the writer of *Josippon* of the tenth century, who tells of the Declaration three times in different ways (4:128–29, 5:145–75, 8:1–2) (and who describes life under the government of Persia as "gentle slavery," 8:40).<sup>18</sup> The Sages and succeeding generations were mainly interested in the Return to Zion as a completed and formative period which set its seal on the entire Second Temple period, and their attitude toward it was shaped by a sense of missed opportunity and failure. While

the Book of Ezra does not blame Cyrus for this failure, the Sages were ambivalent about him. On the one hand they described him positively, unlike their negative portrayal of other foreign kings, and in one legend they even placed him on the exalted throne of King Solomon. On the other hand, they attributed the internal weakness of the Second Temple period to him, explaining the defects of those generations by the fact that the Temple had been built during the reign of a king from the race of Japhet. We also find in the Sages the apologetic version that it was Cyrus who stopped the immigration from Babylon because he did not want his country weakened by the emigration of Jews (*The Song of Songs Rabbah* 5:5): that is, it was Cyrus, not the people, who was to blame for the failure of the Return to Zion.<sup>19</sup>

The reason for this ambivalence apparently stemmed from the profound gap between the Declaration and contemporary expectations regarding it, on the one hand, and the delay in building the Temple and the small number of immigrants, on the other. Others relieved Cyrus of responsibility for the failure and ascribed it to the Jewish people who did not immigrate to Eretz Israel: "Thus said the Holy One blessed be He, if all the children of Israel will be immigrants, the *Shekhinah* [Divine Presence] will descend, and if not, not" (*Pesikta Rabbati* 80:35). This interpretation is shared by the MALBIM (Rabbi Meir Loeb ben Yehiel Mikhel) in his introduction to the commentary on the Book of Haggai.<sup>20</sup> Some think that the immediate historical reason for the Sages' tepid attitude to Cyrus was their ambivalence regarding the initiative of Emperor Julian, "the Apostate," in 362 C.E., who declared his intention to rebuild the Temple destroyed in the time of Adrian as an explicit attempt to "repeat" the building of the Temple inspired by Cyrus. The disappointment with Julian was translated into an anachronistic interpretation of Cyrus's deeds. Here, historical memory conflated the King of Persia and the Emperor of Rome.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, the Sages remembered and explained that formative event and even added details and anachronisms in order to express their historiosophic view, introducing their own facts and interpretations into the consciousness of the Jewish past.

It would seem that, more than recalling the period as it had really been, they recalled expectations and prophecies of the future which had been current at the time.

The debate on the nature of the Second Temple period continued in the philosophy and exegeses of the Middle Ages: whether it had been a period of a "second redemption" or a period of lost opportunity and lack of the Divine Presence, and if so, who had been to blame.<sup>22</sup> In any event, this literature does not contain any repetition of the unique perspective of the Book of Chronicles which saw the Cyrus declaration as initiating a new period in the history of the Jewish people (and which completely ignored the Exodus from Egypt as though wanting to erase it from historical memory).

The Cyrus Declaration is not referred to in historiosophic thought or systematic historiography in the Middle Ages and reappears, as a model and metaphor, in the period of the brief Persian conquest of Eretz Israel from the Byzantines (614–26 C.E.), as an immediate response to the events of the time. The similarity of the names of Cyrus and Chosroes, King of Persia (in Hebrew, Coresh and Cozro), naturally encouraged the parallel and roused expectations for a repetition of history.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, "Cyrus" served as a typological name for the literature of expectation in the generation of the exiles from Spain. In the commentary of Rabbi Yitzhak Abrabanel on *Pirkei Divrei Rabbi Eliezer*, the Ottoman Sultan Mohammed II was endowed with the title of "Divine Messiah of Israel" and one who was appointed to "avenge its enemies."<sup>24</sup>

The image of Cyrus occasionally re-emerged in later generations as a model of an enlightened absolute ruler willing to emancipate his Jewish subjects. It is found in a "choral song" by the *maskil* (adherent of the Jewish Enlightenment movement, the *Haskalah*) Issachar Baer Schlesinger, "Astinas Grandson of Cyrus and His Minister of War Herpagus," "based on the tale of the chronicles of the kings of Mede and Persia."<sup>25</sup> In 1781, the Italian Jewish *maskil* Eliahu Morpurgo compared Cyrus to the Hapsburg Emperor Josef II, who issued the Patent of Tolerance (*Toleranzedikt*) in that year.<sup>26</sup> In the poem by the renowned Russian-Jewish



*maskil* poet Y. L. Gordon, "The Road of My People," written in 1865, Tsar Alexander II appears in the figure of "Cyrus my shepherd," an enlightened ruler who initiates far-reaching reforms in the life of the Jews:

And in our country, the ice broke  
And both spring and flowers were revealed,  
Wisdom hastened to strike its roots in us:  
The King ordered the opening of schools,  
Where the children of Jacob will be taught beautiful  
things,  
For God has roused his spirit as the heart of Cyrus!<sup>27</sup>

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Y. L. Gordon spoke of the "Cyrus spirit" in the sense of a change in the relation of the authorities to the Jews. Napoleon Bonaparte was also described as a Cyrus, and the proclamation of the Jewish Sanhedrin in October 1806 deliberately used allusions to the prophecy in Isaiah about Cyrus to indicate the similarity between the two events that changed the world – the conquest of Napoleon and the Cyrus Declaration.<sup>28</sup>

Although we have surely overlooked other references to the Cyrus Declaration in historical writings during the long period from the Sages to the 1880s, it seems clear that the Cyrus Declaration – a well-known historical fact stored in the collective memory – was not part of active memory. We can learn about historical consciousness and culture from the selections they make from historical information, the hierarchy they grant the facts and the way they use them. From our survey, however brief, we can conclude that the Cyrus Declaration, a dramatic and formative key event in Jewish history – described as a messianic act in its own time – was not accorded an honored status in the hierarchy created by the collective memory either on the thematic or the poetic plane. It disappeared both from the descriptions of the past and from the various messianic and eschatological texts. The historical, or legendary, Cyrus and his Declaration which initiated his period were buried in the depths of memory.

#### IV

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The entire period of the Return to Zion, and along with it King Cyrus and his Declaration, emerged from this oblivion only in the early 1880s for two main reasons.<sup>29</sup> First, Jewish scholars turned to this period in response to the challenge of the picture of the past depicted in Christian historical research. The latter saw the Return to Zion as a fundamental turning-point in the history of the Jewish people, transforming it from a territorial nation to a religious community or church. Second, and more important for our purpose, was the analogical status which Jewish consciousness of the 1880s assigned to the period of the Return to Zion and which arose from the recognition that the Return to Zion was an indisputable historical event (unlike the Exodus from Egypt) and an outstanding messianic event, the result of both the fulfillment of prophecy and dramatic international developments. It was achieved not by a military conquest of Eretz Israel, but with the permission of the ruling power and under its aegis, and was accompanied by the conflict between the mundane reality of the "day of small things," on the one hand, and high messianic expectations which were both restorative and utopian, on the other.

In other words, there were various themes in the period of Hibbat Zion which seemed analogous to those of the earlier period: the profile of the immigrants, the relation between those who remained in exile and those who returned to Eretz Israel, between the "returnees" and the population of the Land, between the Jewish settlement there and the foreign authority, as well as the attitude to the isolationist policy of Ezra and Nehemia – all these themes were used as analogies in the polemics within Hibbat Zion between the religious groups and the "freethinkers," and later in other contexts.<sup>30</sup>

Hibbat Zion saw itself as a third historical turning-point – after the Exodus from Egypt and the Return to Zion. The Sages' ambivalent attitude to Cyrus and his Declaration, and to the entire period of the Return to Zion, was of course familiar to the *maskilim*. Thus, the religious historian and *maskil*, Shmuel Yosef Fein, noted that: "It would seem that because

the building of the Temple was canceled in his time and he did not hasten to give force to his order, the people concluded that Cyrus did not carry out his favor to the Jews wholeheartedly and willingly.”<sup>31</sup> However, that traditional criticism was not powerful enough now to negate the relevance of the “Cyrus model” as an active memory. Both religious and secular *Hovevei Zion* (“Lovers of Zion,” adherents of Hibbat Zion) embraced a positive assessment of the Cyrus Declaration and used it to grant legitimation – with the past as inspiration – to their acts in the present. They explained the Declaration and the subsequent Return to Zion as an outstanding example of redemption by natural means, as opposed to the redemption from Egypt by miraculous means. Immigration to the United States was compared to the Exodus from Egypt because it was a mass exodus, unlike the tiny settlements of the *Hovevei Zion*. Indeed, the Return to Zion could be used as a general metaphor of redemption; but when it was transferred to the concrete historical plane, it assumed the limited value of the historical Return to Zion, and not the “Settlement of Zion” as a metahistorical symbol. Indeed, although the 1880s were marked by a messianic and revolutionary mood, there was a wide gap between the abstract messianic rhetoric and the specific historical models referred to by contemporaries.

The Cyrus Declaration was thus an outstanding example – and a historical precedent legitimizing action in the present – of how national goals could be achieved with the approval of governments and under their aegis – of “redemption under the aegis of a foreign king” (*acta Dei per francos*). Cyrus was seen as one who had enabled the realization of the prophecy and vision immanent in Jewish history, i.e., as an instrument of Divine Providence. Nevertheless, without that human act, the act of a foreign king at that, redemption could never have come from the power of the Jews themselves. This is a typical paradigm of historical messianism which I propose to call paradoxically “amessianic messianism,” i.e., messianism attached to a dramatic event which actually took place in history rather than in a vision, a historical breakthrough

which, however, was not accompanied by eschatological events.<sup>32</sup>

The literature of the observant *Hovevei Zion* also used many examples from the time of the Second Temple, probably because the model of the Return to Zion endowed them with historical legitimization against the opposition from Orthodox Jewry and enabled them to resolve the dilemma arising not only from their cooperation with the secular nationalists, but also from their adoption of the latter's historical and realistic perspective which rejected the prevailing, deep-rooted concept of not "forcing the end." Significantly, I did not find references in the rhetoric and polemical literature of the period to the Sages' doubts about Cyrus's intentions or their attribution of the weakness of the Second Temple to its inception by a foreign king.

Thus, Rabbi Mordechai Eliasberg, one of the first leaders of Hibbat Zion in Russia, wrote that:

The redemption from Babylon by Ezra the Scribe ... was hidden in the mists of nature according to the order of King Cyrus and the desire of the peoples who helped the returnees from Babylon with silver and gold and property....<sup>33</sup>

This statement was designed, as noted above, to give a "seal of approval" to the political activity of the movement and was aimed at Orthodox Jews; secular nationalists used the historical example against the *maskilim*, the anti-nationalist adherents of emancipation.<sup>34</sup> In an 1884 pamphlet "On the Revival of Israel on the Land of Our Ancestors," the Hebrew writer and political journalist Moshe Leib Lilienblum, one of the leaders of Hibbat Zion, wrote:

If our German sages had lived in the time of Cyrus and if the latter had asked them if he should help the exiles immigrate to Eretz Israel, according to their view of the facts they would have had to answer: The people of Israel have no land, they are scattered all over Asia Minor – in Assyria, Babylonia, Media, Persia, Halah and

Habor, Sheba and even in the land of China; they do not speak their own language (Nehemiah 13), therefore they are not a nation and it is not right to return them to the Land of Israel as a nation. Fortunately for us, there were no such casuists, the children of Israel returned to the land of their ancestors and to a national life. Then once again, they had a land, a language and all national properties.<sup>35</sup>

In the summer of 1882, Lilienblum wrote a letter to Laurence Oliphant, the English writer and Christian mystic, who was working to help the Russian-Jewish refugees in Galicia and trying to obtain approval from the Turkish Sultan for his plan for large-scale Jewish settlement in Palestine – and who, paradoxically, more than anyone else before or after him, was endowed with the lofty title of “Cyrus” (a distinction which reveals more about the expectations of the time and the repertoire of current images than about the figure to whom it was applied). In the letter (which may not have been sent), Lilienblum wrote:

... when Israel was in Babylon, they had little strength to find freedom for their souls. Then the Lord roused the spirit of his messiah, Cyrus King of Persia, who called for freedom for those imprisoned in exile and allowed them to migrate to the land of their ancestors. The King, who was not one of the children of Israel and therefore was able to release the imprisoned Israel, sent forth his word and the oppressed people saw him as a finger of God and returned to the Holy Land.... God willing, you will succeed in returning the redeemed to the land of their ancestors and they will call you a new name: the messiah of Israel.<sup>36</sup>

“Lord, the Divine Providence itself has given you the scepter of leadership of our people,” *Hovevei Zion* in Nikolayev wrote to Oliphant in 1882.<sup>37</sup> The historical precedent of the Cyrus Declaration also enabled the pious and the traditionalists to find legitimation in human initiative as opposed to traditional

messianic expectations. It was Oliphant who was given the status of divine messiah, the human instrument operating in history on behalf of the God of Israel. Thus, the leaders of the Society for the Settlement of the Holy Land in Bucharest wrote to Oliphant at the beginning of 1881:

We, the children of Israel, will always place our trust in God, the maker of heaven and earth, who, in His mercy and grace, showed us many times miracles that a human hand cannot perform.... But our history teaches us that the Highest Providence always chose the chosen ones It preferred to be the redeemers of this despised and persecuted people, not one of the children of Israel, but of the Righteous Gentiles. Cyrus King of Persia was the chosen one of God His Messiah, God roused his spirit and he spread the word throughout his kingdom.... And who knows if God did not choose His chosen one Oliphant ... and due to your efforts, honorable sir, the cornerstone of our community will be laid in the ruined and desolated land of our forefathers....<sup>38</sup>

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The issue here is not a “messianic spirit” or a “messianic age” but a personal messiah who is not a Jew. Perhaps it was more convenient to place the mantle of messianism on a foreigner. (Herzl could not be compared to Cyrus because he was a Jew.) These analogies seem to express an ideological need, although in some of them this appears more on the poetic than on the thematic plane: Cyrus indicates or symbolizes a familiar historical event and thus the rhetorical and metaphorical use of him is designed to convey an accepted message in a condensed way.

Those who criticized the relation between *Hovevei Zion* and Oliphant referred to the latter as a “false Cyrus” and denied the parallel between him and the Persian King.<sup>39</sup> In any event, the leaders of Hibbat Zion did not engage in diplomacy with the aim of reproducing the “Cyrus model.” Cyrus simply served as a good case – in fact the only one in remembered historical experience – which symbolized what should be expected from diplomacy and legitimized the latter as a

historical political method. It functioned on both the thematic and the poetic planes, i.e., it was used to emphasize the parallel between the two periods and to convey economically and conventionally the message contemporaries used to understand their own period and define their acts.

## V

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Would the numerous references to Cyrus scattered throughout the writings of this period prove that Cyrus and his "Balfour Declaration" had indeed returned to the collective memory? The basic question is what this collective memory represents. Where can it be "found"? Is a body of texts enough to demonstrate its presence – and especially its active presence – in consciousness? What exemplary group of texts can constitute sufficient proof of the existence of an active item of memory and, even more so, its influence on the formation of morals and attitudes or decisions and actions?

All we can say in this instance is that the presence of the "Cyrus model" in this period is striking because previously it had hardly existed and because it appeared with such frequency within a brief span of time. If the use of history in the context of culture means, to paraphrase M. I. Finley, selection by focusing on a few bits of the past which thereby acquire permanence, relevance and significance,<sup>40</sup> we can argue that the appearance of Cyrus is significant, expressing dimensions in the modern Jewish *Weltanschauung*. In any case, this is still a long way from the argument that a corpus of quotations is evidence of the existence of an almost metaphysical entity – "historical memory." We have indications that the memory of Cyrus served to explain the present, as a symbol and sign of it, legitimizing and granting it a sense of certainty, in both the cultural and the political debate. But it would be difficult to argue that Hibbat Zion arose in order to restore the Return to Zion or that the memory of the previous event was what motivated people to join the new movement. At most, processes, decisions and trends were endowed with historical "validity" or a historical

illustration after – and not before – the fact, by the memory of the historical precedent.

Despite this reservation, it must be stated that even if, for example, there were an official holiday in Israel to mark the Cyrus Declaration, or if schools were instructed to devote a lesson to commemorating the day of the Declaration, as was once done to mark the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration of November 1917, or if every Israeli city had a “Cyrus Declaration Street,” all these official, organized signs would still not necessarily indicate the strength of its presence in the public national memory. This is why I have argued that the use of the past in the system of signs in the diverse kinds of everyday verbal communication, which is usually simplistic and iconic and which turns “historical facts” into signs in the “historical language,” sometimes has greater value than the many forms of passive presence (street names, monuments, etc.). Here the function of the message, its transmission and reception seem direct and can be quantified and evaluated. A monument is a passive part of everyday life, despite its physical presence, while a text is an active part of the active historical memory, although it is dispersed and unsystematic, almost “not present.”

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The selection of a period with an analogical status and of the repertoire of “signs” is naturally influenced by changing historical processes which occur in the signifier and his understanding of the signified. The Balfour Declaration was interpreted, almost automatically, as a dramatic realization of the pattern of repetition and as conclusive evidence of the validity of the analogy. This was also the general feeling regarding the overall analogy between the Return to Zion and the beginning of the Zionist enterprise. Thus, a romantic nationalist historian like Yosef Klausner, after describing the age of the Return to Zion, could proclaim solemnly: “... and when we turn our hearts to the *Yishuv* [Jewish community] in Eretz Israel in our time, it is hard for us to refrain from crying out: ‘Everything has already been!’” Yet, when Klausner wanted to stress that the Cyrus Declaration was not only a historical, but also a miraculous and unexpected event, an extraordinary breakthrough, he made the opposite parallel:



"... history starts in every place in which extraordinary events take place. And is not the Balfour Declaration of our time and on our behalf a stunning and extraordinary event?"<sup>41</sup> Academic writing on the two periods also frequently used such analogies.

Contemporaries perceived the Balfour Declaration as a repetition of the Cyrus Declaration, and as a typological event and a turning-point. The expectations from the Balfour Declaration were reinforced by the results of the Cyrus Declaration. The past granted a sense of security and certainty to a present which was still foggy and precarious. The Balfour Declaration and the Mandate, stated a delegate to the Zionist Executive Committee in 1920, should be remembered together with "the documents given to the Jews by Cyrus and Artaxerxes."<sup>42</sup>

The writer and political figure Moshe Smilansky took the parallel to extremes when he asserted in a newspaper article that the Balfour Declaration was "a royal proclamation prepared for us in advance, in all our streets it will be read." The article abounds with allusions to the literature of the Return to Zion and compares the "Declaration of Cyrus which was achieved by a Jew from Babylon and the Declaration of Balfour which is in the hands of a Jew from Lithuania" (that is, Chaim Weizmann).<sup>43</sup> Enthusiasm about the declaration and the model of return made Smilansky declare that the Jewish people was facing the predetermined realization of the pattern of return inherent in Jewish history: the present was the realization of the past (not only of the prophecies of the past) and its reproduction.

This presence of the model of the Cyrus Declaration in the active historical consciousness in the years 1917–18 prompted the writer Y. H. Brenner to try to dampen the excitement and prick the balloon of expectations with the pin of "historical realism." He sarcastically described the enthusiastic articles and talk about the Balfour Declaration and the horizons it opened as being full of "the Cyrus faith" and as celebrating "Balfour-Cyrus."<sup>44</sup> Brenner was referring to the current naive political faith that Britain's agreement to support Zionism did indeed mean the fulfillment of the historical prophecy. He

thereby rejected the typology of the Cyrus Declaration as it appeared in the literature of Hibbat Zion.

Given the prominence of Cyrus in the polemics of this period, it is no wonder that when a symbol of the disappointment with British policies was needed, Britain was compared with the Persia of Cyrus. Thus, the eschatological national poet Uri Zvi Greenberg wrote in 1930, after the Arab riots of 1929: "You king have cheated me. Our wounded nation called to you: / Cyrus, king – the most powerful king in the world! With the prayer of freedom which was covered by / The follies of the generations...."<sup>45</sup> Here he describes Cyrus in positive terms in distinction to the negative portrayal of the "King of Britain," who represents the policies of his government. However, from the 1920s, literature returned to the Sages' negative attitude to Cyrus. The defects in the *Yishuv* under the Mandatory government were compared to those in the earlier "returnees to Zion." Just as the essential weakness in the latter case had stemmed from the fact that the Second Temple had been built by the permission and under the protection of a foreign king of flesh and blood, and that even the priests of the Second Temple had received their authority from a foreign power, so the "national home" was now being born under foreign license and protection, and not as the outcome of the subjective, immanent, visionary force of the new Jewish nationalism. Thus, the spirit of the national home was defective, even defiled, and its liberation was also a liberation from the model of the Return to Zion.

Moreover, anyone who continued to refer to the Cyrus Declaration and to compare the *Yishuv* to the Return to Zion was depicted as a political minimalist, a defeatist willing to be content with a "day of small things," a miserable autonomy granted by the grace of foreigners. If there was a need for an analogous historical model, there were other, more positive, periods that could be cited: the period of the settlement of the Land of Canaan and the kingdom of David and Solomon, or other chapters in the Second Temple period, from the time of the Hasmoneans on.<sup>46</sup>

We can therefore conclude that it was not only ideological opposition to the analogous status of the Return to Zion that

caused its decline in the collective memory, but also that the model no longer had content or signs perceived as relevant or useful. This was not simply an instance of deliberate neglect, but of ignoring an event because it could no longer be used. The case of Cyrus as such, and as part of the case of the Return to Zion as a whole, is therefore an instructive example of the complex and stratified nature of "historical memory," its link with historical writing (including historiography), and its various uses and functions. A single case, however, cannot exhaust the complexities of the subject. More precise definitions are needed, and more case-study research, so that this general and abstract concept, more metaphor than "reality," may achieve its rightful place in the history of culture.

*Translated from the Hebrew by Barbara Harshav*

## Notes

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- 1 This essay is an expanded version of a short paper I presented at Tel Aviv University, 13 January 1989, in honor of the publication of the collection of essays by Bernard Lewis in Hebrew translation, Rachel Simon, ed., *Bernard Lewis on History: Collected Studies* (Jerusalem, 1988). The conversation in the epitaph below appears in an appendix to Avigdor Lowenheim, "Herzl and the Jews of Hungary: A Discussion from 1903" (in Hebrew), *Tzion* 54, no.4 (1989): 467.
- 2 See Bernard Lewis, *History, Remembered, Recovered, Invented* (Princeton, 1976) (Hebrew translation, 5–30). The question to what extent the myth of Masada represents the situation and state of mind of the new Israeli nation requires a separate discussion which I shall undertake on another occasion. There is another connection between the myth of Cyrus and the history of the Jewish people: the myth of the sublime king, who personally embodies the "national golden mean" by divine grace and is the earthly fulfillment of divinity, may have passed into Judaism under the influence of the Persian concept of true kingship. If so, the figure of King David may have been created on the model of Cyrus in the Persian historical memory and religious and national propaganda. Cf. Samuel K. Eddy, *The King Is Dead. Studies in the New Eastern Resistance to Hellenism, 34–31 B.C.* (Nebraska, 1961), 37–64.
- 3 See Lionel Pearson, "Historical Allusions in the Attic Orators," *Classical Philosophy* 34, no. 3 (July 1941): 209–29.
- 4 Only in modern Persia is Cyrus common as a first name. It is also used as a family name (the Tel Aviv phone book lists about 30 families named Coresh – the Hebrew version of the name). In European languages, as far as I know, the

- name is used only in English and fairly recently, and from there it became a Jewish first name as well. In Israel there are only seven streets named after Cyrus, and in Holon emigrants from Iran are erecting a "Cyrus House."
- 5 During the period of the Hasmoneans it was apparently not known how long the Persian period in the history of the Land of Israel had lasted. The *Megillat Ta'anit* of the Hasmonean period mentions the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem after the return from exile ("the day on which they began to build they made into a holiday"). But the sources do not mention that the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem (the wall and not the return to Zion) was celebrated in any way in that period. Cf. H. Lichtenstein's edition in *Hebrew Union College Annual* 8/9 (1930/31). I am grateful to Dr. Yoram Arder for this information.
  - 6 Cf. Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York, 1985). The Exodus from Egypt is a myth of complete messianic *beginning*, even though it is not accompanied by a myth of complete messianic fulfillment. From the point of view of the Bible the Exodus from Egypt is a full redemption which creates the *people of the Torah* and leads it to the promised land and promised redemption. There is therefore no need for a messianic picture of the future: the latter was evoked only after failure or destruction, while in the Exodus from Egypt a brand new beginning lay before the Jewish people.
  - 7 On the "pattern of repetition" (*Wiederholungsstruktur*), see Sara Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1977), 327. The origin of the term is in W. Rudolph, *Ezra und Nehemia* (Tübingen, 1949), 6. On the conflict of the historical traditions in the consciousness of the "remnant" on the one hand and of the "returnees to Zion" on the other, see Haim Tadmor, "The Relation of the Jewish People to the Land of Israel in the Light of the Babylonian Exile and the Return to Zion," in A. Mirsky et al., eds., *Exile and Diaspora: Studies in the History of the Jewish People* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1988), 50–56.
  - 8 Howard Jacobson, "Visions of the Past: Jews and Greeks,"

*Judaism* 35, no. 4 (Fall 1986): 467–82.

- 9 For a more detailed discussion see below, and also my article, "The Return to Zion in the Hibbat Zion Movement" (in Hebrew), *Ha-Tzionut* 9 (1984): 359–72.
- 10 This definition of myth is taken from G. S. Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths* (New York, 1975), 28–29.
- 11 Such a view is characteristic of Roman and Hellenistic literature and that of the Jewish Sages, although we should distinguish between examples which demonstrate a moral lesson (as in Roman literature and that of the Sages) and examples which demonstrate general and eternal laws of "universal history" (as in the Enlightenment's philosophy of the history of rationalism).
- 12 Quoted in H. Reill, *The German Enlightenment and the Rise of Historicism* (Berkeley, 1975), 102.
- 13 Thucydides, *Historiae* 1.22. This does not mean that there is a law in history which determines that events recur but rather that there are universally valid rules that operate within a framework of specific conditions.
- 14 Quoted from the Hebrew translation of Jacob Burckhardt, *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen*, trans. Ch. Isaak (Jerusalem, 1962), 8.
- 15 See Roman Jacobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," in idem, *Semiotics, Linguistics, Poetics, Selected Papers*, Hebrew translation ed. I. Even-Zohar and G. Touri (Tel Aviv, 1986), 140–41.
- 16 Elias Bickerman, "The Edict of Cyrus in Ezra," in idem, *Studies in Jewish and Christian History* (Leyden, 1976), 1:72–108. Bickerman also discusses here the relationship of the Sages to the Declaration, emphasizing their conclusion that the Divine Presence did not rest upon the Temple because it was built by the inspiration of a foreign king (in the tractate *Yoma* 9). See also Haim Tadmor, "The Rise of Coresh and the Historical Background to His Declaration," in idem, *The Restoration in the Persian Period* (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1983); and Y. Ben-Zvi, "Cyrus King of Persia and His Edict to the Exiles" (in Hebrew), *Third World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem, 1961), 29–31. The Cyrus Cylinder was discovered by H. Rassam in 1879 and deciphered by C. G. Rawlinson in 1880 – two years before the inception of

Hibbat Zion.

- 17 See Shmuel Hacoheh, *Introduction to the Books of Ezra and Nehemia* (in Hebrew) (Ramat Gan, 1987); and Yosef Tavori, "The Persian Period According to the Sages," in *Millet: Everyman's University Studies in Jewish History and Culture* (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1985), 2:66–77. Tavori claims that the Sages had no historical tradition on the period other than that in the Bible and emphasizes their interest in making Persian chronography conform to that of the Bible. However, it seems unlikely that the Sages really did not know anything about the period from 538 to 330 B.C.E. or that they were content with chronographical knowledge, especially in light of the fact that they were in Persia and thus close to the Persian historical tradition.
- 18 *The Josippon (Josephus Gorionides)* (in Hebrew), ed. with an introduction, commentary and notes by David Flusser (Jerusalem, 1981). Josephus, in *Jewish Antiquities*, includes the episode in a very abbreviated form in vol. 3, book 11, 3–5.
- 19 See the detailed discussion in Hacoheh, *Introduction to the Books of Ezra and Nehemia*, 80–92, and in Efraim A. Orbach, "Cyrus and His Declaration According to the Sages" (in Hebrew), *Molad* 19, no. 157 (1961): 368–74.
- 20 Hacoheh, *Introduction to the Books of Ezra and Nehemia*, 89.
- 21 See the analysis of the policies of Julian and the Jewish response to his plan in Moshe David Herr, *The History of Eretz Israel*, vol. 5, *The Roman Byzantine Period* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1985), 70–74.
- 22 For the concept of the Second Temple and the Return to Zion in the *Book of Principles* of Rabbi Yosef Albo, for example, see Yona Ben-Sasson, "The Picture of History of Rabbi Yosef Albo," in R. Bonfil et al., eds., *Culture and Society in the History of Israel in the Middle Ages: Collection of Articles in Honor of Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1989), 503–9.
- 23 Zvi Baras, "The Persian Conquest and the End of the Byzantine Rule," in Baras et al., eds., *Eretz Israel from the Destruction of the Second Temple to the Muslim Conquest* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1982), 1:323–26. In religious

propaganda and debates in that period, Jews and Christians competed with one another in the use of the "memory of the Return to Zion" and its parallels.

- 24 Isaiah Tishbi, *Messianism in the Time of the Expulsion from Spain and Portugal* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1985), 75–76. According to the picture of the eschatological future, Cyrus, who had destroyed Babylon, was also to destroy "Rome": the Turks were identified as "Persia" and Christianity as "Rome."
- 25 *Bikkurei ha-Ittim* (Vienna, 1829). (These Hebrew literary-scientific journals published annually in Vienna from 1821 to 1832 were a central forum for *Haskalah* literature.)
- 26 Shlomo Simonson, "A Few Responses of the Jews of Italy to the 'First Emancipation' and the *Haskalah*" (in Hebrew), *Italia Judaica* (Rome, 1989), 38.
- 27 Yehuda Leyb Gordon, *Poetry* (in Hebrew) (1884; Tel Aviv, 1956), 18.
- 28 Baruch Mevorach, ed., *Napoleon and His Period* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1968), 8. In a clear allusion to the Cyrus Declaration, the proclamation of October 1806 states that "God of the world, who rules over all the kings of the earth, chose him [Napoleon] as a ruler and commander of these lands...."
- 29 See Shavit, "The Return to Zion"; also Ezriel Shohat, "Names, Symbols and Way of Life in Hibbat Zion" (in Hebrew), *Shivat Tzion* 2/3 (1981/82): 238–50.
- 30 It used to be the practice in Israeli schools to stage a public trial on whether Ezra and Nehemia had behaved according to Jewish law when they expelled foreign women and assumed an "isolationist" policy; this, apparently, was the last theme of the period which historical memory continued to use.
- 31 Shmuel Yosef Fein, *The Book of Chronicles* (in Hebrew) (Vilna, 1891), 9, note 1.
- 32 See the survey of religious literature in S. Z. Schechter, "The Reason Given by the Rabbis for Their Cooperation with the *Maskilim* in the 'Hibbat Zion' Movement," in the yearbook, *Studies in the History of the Jewish People and the Land of Israel* (in Hebrew) (Haifa, 1978), 4:224–52. In his



- book *Drishat Tzion*, Rabbi Zvi Kalischer writes specifically that redemption will begin with the "awakening of the spirit of generosity and with the desire of the state to gather a few of the dispersed of Israel in the Holy Land." See *The Zionist Writings of Rabbi Zvi Kalischer* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1947), 38.
- 33 Quoted in Schechter, "The Reason Given by the Rabbis."
  - 34 There are numerous such statements in writings of the time. See Shulamit Laskov, ed., *Documents on the History of Hibbat Zion and the Settlement of Eretz Israel* (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1982), vol. 1, 1870–1882. The rabbinical literature emphasized that the Return to Zion was a "redemption by means of nature" and by royal permission. For further details see Shavit, "The Return to Zion." Allusions to the Declaration, its background and results are scattered throughout many contemporary texts.
  - 35 Quoted in Sh. Yavnieli, *The Period of Hibbat Zion* (in Hebrew), 2nd ed. (Tel Aviv, 1961), 2:129.
  - 36 Laskov, ed., *Documents on the History of Hibbat Zion*, doc. 65, pp. 259–60.
  - 37 Ibid., doc. 64, pp. 257–58. There is an extensive literature on Laurence Oliphant and the Zionist, Jewish episode in his life. What concerns us here is contained in Shulamit Laskov, *The Biluim* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1979), 49–83. See also Ann Taylor, *Laurence Oliphant, 1829–1888* (Oxford, 1982).
  - 38 Quoted in Yavnieli, *The Period of Hibbat Zion*, 1:105–6.
  - 39 Laskov, ed., *Documents on the History of Hibbat Zion*, doc. 70, pp. 268–72.
  - 40 M. I. Finley, "Myth, Memory and History," in idem, *Abuses of History* (New York, 1972), 30.
  - 41 Yosef Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1927), 114. For his commentary on the prophetic point of view about Cyrus in his time, see 95–96.
  - 42 Gedalia Yogeve et al., eds., *The Minutes of the Zionist General Council 1919–1929*, vol. 2, *February 1920–August 1921* (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1984), 29. See also Mordechai Ben-Hillel Hacohen, *War of the Nations in Eretz Israel: Diary 1914–1918* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1985), vol. 2. After the

conquest of Jerusalem, Hachohen wrote in 1917 that the Balfour Declaration was “a kind of proclamation of Cyrus King of Persia. Hearts beat strongly” (999), and that it would do for the Jewish people what the Cyrus Declaration had done for it in the distant past – despite all the efforts of the modern slanderers (the traitors) (1008).

- 43 Moshe Smilansky, “Looking Toward History” (in Hebrew), in the literary supplement of *Hadashot me-ha-Aretz*, 5 July 1918.
- 44 Y. H. Brenner, “Obsolete Conversations” (in Hebrew), *Ha-Adamah* (1920), in *The Writings of Y. H. Brenner* (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1960), 2:159.
- 45 Uri Zvi Greenberg, *Book of Accusation and Faith* (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1937).
- 46 In Israel today the image of Cyrus and the erection of the Temple under the aegis of a foreign king are placed in opposition to the purity of the Temple and the conquest of the land in ancient times or in the period of the Hasmoneans. See Israel Eldad, “First and Second,” in idem, *Reflections on Festivals* (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1981), 131–32.