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and arose in the pre-Christian era.\textsuperscript{26} It is the \textit{Targum Jonathan} which contains a translation of the prophetic books.\textsuperscript{27} This translation was based on a Hebrew text very close to the proto-Masoretic tradition, although at times it resorts to paraphrase.\textsuperscript{28} A non-MT reading is found in Zech. 12:5.

Among the Latin sources for Zechariah, Jerome’s translation of the OT between A.D. 390 and 405 is the most important. Jerome’s Vulgate relied on a Hebrew text nearly identical to the proto-Masoretic Text.\textsuperscript{29} Further evidence of the Hebrew text upon which Jerome relied can be found in his commentary on the Twelve Prophets.\textsuperscript{30}

\section*{II. REFERENTIAL HISTORY}

While the textual resources identified above represent the development of the book of Zechariah after its completion as a literary work, interpretation in this commentary will focus on the meaning of Zechariah to its original audience(s). The following sections first orient readers to the history of the period associated with the book of Zechariah and then trace the history of the composition of the book.

Since the book of Zechariah was composed over the eighty-year pe-

\begin{flushright}
28. As noted by Cathcart and Gordon, \textit{The Targum of the Minor Prophets}, 10: “While the paraphrastic nature of the Tgs. sometimes makes it difficult to pronounce with conviction on the Hebrew reading which underlies the Aramaic, this normally affects single words and does not invalidate the overall conclusion that in the Tgs. generally it is the Massoretic text-form that is represented.” Cathcart and Gordon speak of “silent emendation,” which means a change that occurred in the mind of the Targumist rather than reflected in a Hebrew Vorlage (see p. 11). Cf. Tov, \textit{Textual Criticism}, 149; \textit{BHQ}, 9*.
30. Adriaen, \textit{Commentarii in Prophetas minores}. See also http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/02m/0347-0420_Hieronymus_Commentariorum_In_Zachariam_Prophetam_Libri_Duo_MLT.pdf
\end{flushright}
period from 520 to 440 B.C. (see below: Compositional History), a grasp of the history of this period is helpful for understanding the experience of the audiences who received these prophetic words. The basic contours of the early Persian period can be reconstructed from evidence from Babylonian, Persian, Greek, Egyptian, and Jewish sources from the sixth century B.C. and on.

A. THE BABYLONIAN PERIOD

One cannot underestimate the impact on the Jewish community of the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Prompted by King Zedekiah’s disloyalty to their vassal agreement, Nebuchadnezzar would apply the violent force of his imperial army against this tiny kingdom on the edge of the Babylonian Empire and bring to an end for all time a Judean kingdom ruled by a Davidic scion. Many Jews were killed, many fled voluntarily to surrounding nations, and many were exiled to the heartland of the Babylonian Empire, while others remained in the land. A further dislocation of the people would take place in 582-581 (Jer. 52:30). Nebuchadnezzar would rule until 562, succeeded by a series of unsuccessful rulers from 562-556, including his son Amel-Marduk (Evil-Merodach, 2 Kgs. 25:27-30), his son-in-law Neriglissar, and finally Neriglissar’s son Labashi-Marduk. It would take a powerful general in the Babylonian army, Nabonidus, to finally stabilize the empire.

Babylonian-Median cooperation in the late seventh century B.C. brought down the Assyrian Empire as Cyaxares of Media (625-585) joined with Nebuchadnezzar’s father, Nabopolassar (626-605) to put increasing pressure on the Assyrians. Assyria’s demise began in 626 as Nabopolassar wrested control of Babylon from the Assyrians, only to be accelerated by Cyaxares’s conquest of Assyur (the ancient capital of Assyria) in 614. Nabopolassar would arrive late to Cyaxares’s siege of Assyur and make a treaty with the Medes. While the Babylonians and Medes would besiege Nineveh together for three months in 612, the Assyrian Empire would fall to the Babylonians, with the Medes remaining on the northern and eastern boundaries of the newly-formed Babylonian Empire. By 585 Astyages would inherit the Median kingdom from his father Cyaxares and so was the Median king when Nabonidus ascended the Babylonian throne in 556. The Medes controlled Persian territory at this time, secured through a marriage between Astyages’s daughter Mandane and Cambyses I of Anshan. By 553 Astyages’s grandson, Cyrus, would revolt and gain control over the sprawling Median kingdom. By 547/6 Cyrus would extend his territory to the west across the Hyphasis River as he conquered Lydia, then ruled by King Croesus. He would also move to the east, extending his territory as far as the Jaxartes River.
While Cyrus was extending his holdings to the north and east of the Babylonian Empire, Nabonidus had largely abandoned the heartland of Babylon. Ironically, it was originally Cyrus's revolt against Astyages that freed Nabonidus to rebuild his mother's temple in Haran, the first step in his abandonment of Babylon. Nabonidus installed his son Belshazzar on the throne of the city of Babylon so that he could move his own operations to the oasis of Teima in the Arabian desert. The purpose for this geographic shift is uncertain. Although it is possible that Nabonidus was losing his mind, it may be that he wanted to build a temple in Teima to the god of his mother (a priestess of the moon-god), to shift the center of the empire towards the west and south in order to subjugate the Arabs and prepare for an attack on Egypt, to control the rich Arabian trade routes, or to find a better climate for his health.31 No matter the reason, his absence from Babylon incited dissatisfaction among the populace, especially among the elite of the city, and with the expansion of Cyrus's kingdom Nabonidus returned to Babylon to shore up his power base at home. In the final months of Nabonidus's rule the emperor transferred many gods to Babylon, which only served to increase the fury of the priestly class.

B. CYRUS (539-530 B.C.)

In 539 B.C. Cyrus crossed the Zagros mountains, forded the Tigris at Opis, and marched with little resistance into Babylonian territory (see Daniel 5) before taking the mighty city of Babylon. Cyrus describes his entrance into Babylon as one of a liberator, not a conqueror, as he assumed control over the Babylonian Empire. He commemorated his triumph over Babylon on a clay cylinder discovered in archaeological work in Mesopotamia. The cylinder describes his divine election (Marduk, the chief god of Babylon, commissioned him to conquer Babylon) and communal embrace. After taking control of Babylon, he received obeisance from rulers throughout the Babylonian Empire. On the cylinder he describes his early initiative in southern Mesopotamia to reconstruct sanctuaries for the gods of the nations he conquered and to return the gods and their people to their lands:

... From [Ninev]eh (?), Ashur and Susa, Agade, Eshnunna, Zamban, Meturnu, Der, as far as the region of Gutium, I returned the (images of) the gods to the sacred centers [on the other side of] the Tigris whose

sanctuaries had been abandoned for a long time, and I let them dwell in eternal abodes. I gathered all their inhabitants and returned (to them) their dwellings. In addition, at the command of Marduk, the great lord, I settled in their habitations, in pleasing abodes, the gods of Sumer and Akkad, whom Nabonidus, to the anger of the lord of the gods, had brought into Babylon. May all the gods whom I settled in their sacred centers ask daily of Bel and Nabu that my days be long and may they intercede for my welfare. May they say to Marduk, my lord: “As for Cyrus, the king who reveres you, and Cambyses, his son, [ ] a reign.” I settled all the lands in peaceful abodes.32

Through this cylinder Cyrus accentuates the peaceful transition from the rule of Nabonidus to his own rule and provides insight into the political and religious policies that made this possible.33 An echo of the policy announced in the Cyrus Cylinder can be discerned in the OT. The book of Isaiah highlights the hopes among the exilic community connected with Cyrus and the Persians (Isa. 44:28; 45:1, 13), and 2 Chr. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4; and Ezra 6:1-5 provide evidence of Cyrus’s fulfillment of these hopes, as Cyrus proclaims his support for the return of the people, reconstruction of the temple, and return of the temple’s appurtenances.34 Ezra 1:9-11; 5:13-16 describe the response of Jews who transported temple utensils and laid the foundation of the temple soon after Cyrus took control over Babylon (ca. 539-537). In this early period the Jews also rebuilt the altar on the Temple Mount, reinstituted sacrifice, and began preparation for the temple building (Ezra 3:1-7).35 The fact, however, that the temple would not be completed until the reign of Darius reveals that these early efforts soon came to an end, due not only to opposition from outside forces (Ezra 3–4), but also to the difficulty of the task and the demands of life for the newly-settled community. Ezra 1 and 5 refer to a figure named Sheshbazzar, who is identified as “a prince of Judah” (han-nāšî ‘lihûdâ) in Ezra 1:8 (cf. 1:11) and as a “governor” (pehâ) in Ezra 5:14 (cf. 5:16). Some have identified this figure with the Davidic descendant Shenaazzar (1 Chr. 3:18), son of Jehoiachin, the penultimate king of Judah, because of the similarity between the two names, or with Zerubbabel, the grandson of Jehoiachin, because of the similarity between their titles and actions (both

32. COS, 2:124 (pp. 315-16).
33. See further Boda, “Terrifying the Horns.”
are governors who lay foundations for the temple and transport donations for the temple). 36 But most likely Sheshbazzar was a non-Davidic Jewish official commissioned as the first leader in Persian-ruled Yehud, which comprised the core of the old preexilic kingdom of Judah (southern kingdom). The term “governor” (pehâ) is admittedly a challenge to define with precision in the Persian political system, 37 but based on biblical and archaeological sources, recent researchers have traced a continuous line of officials ruling in Yehud with the same title “governor” from the beginning of Persian rule. 38 The relationship between this official and his region of authority (Yehud) and the surrounding regions, especially Samaria, is uncertain, 39 although it is likely that Yehud was a separate province within the jurisdiction of the satrapy of Babylon-Beyond the River (the former Babylonian Empire). Although this satrapy was bipartite in structure (with sub-satrapies of Babylon and Beyond the River), during the reign of Xerxes, due to the Babylonian uprisings, it would be divided into two separate satrapies.

C. CAMBYSES (530-522 B.C.) AND DARIUS (522-486 B.C.)

Cyrus’s reign was cut short by his tragic death in 530 B.C. in battle on the eastern frontier of his empire. His son Cambyses ascended the throne and by 525 had succeeded in incorporating Egypt into the Persian Empire. While he was at this western frontier of his empire, Cambyses’s rule was challenged in the Persian heartland in March 522 as a magi in the court (variously named as Bardiya/Gaumata) rebelled, claiming to be Cambyses’s brother Smerdis (thus often named Pseudo-Smerdis). Cambyses had eliminated his brother prior to his Egyptian campaign, but this Bardiya/Gaumata had been able to pull off a ruse and challenge Cambyses’s rule. The core of the empire

36. See Josephus, Ant. 11.1.3.
supported the rebellion because the new ruler had promised tax relief. Cambyses, leading the main flank of the Persian army, began the trek to Mesopotamia to quell this rebellion, but died of a self-inflicted, accidental wound while in the Levant.

Darius, one of his generals, would replace Cambyses, claiming blood relation to the royal family and gaining the support of the army. Together with “the Seven,” representing the key leading clans of Persia, Darius succeeded in eliminating Bardiya/Gaumata in September. 40 Since the regions had supported Bardiya/Gaumata, his death prompted rebellions across the empire. Important among these rebellions were those in Babylon in 522-521, beginning with one led by Nidintu-Bel (claiming to be Nebuchadnezzar III), which was crushed in December 522 by Darius, and another by Arakha (claiming to be Nebuchadnezzar IV) in southern Babylon in 521, which was not suppressed until November 521. The consequences of this second rebellion were serious for Babylon, as Darius impaled Arakha, his nobles, and twenty-five hundred supporters at the city of Babylon. Darius’s problems in his empire, however, were far from over, since Egypt revolted in 519, leading to Darius’s Egyptian expedition during 519-518 which succeeded in reconquering Egypt for Persia. With the regions in the central and western territories firmly under his control, Darius set his sights on the eastern frontier, extending the imperial borders to the Indus valley and thus constructing an empire that encompassed the Nile, Tigris-Euphrates, and Indus river valleys for the first time in history. The size and stability of this empire would allow Darius to build for the Persians their own showcase city, known to the Greeks as Persepolis (Persian-City), replacing the former capital Pasargadae, built by Cyrus to commemorate his victory over Astyages. The Persians would continue to use the major ancient capitals of Mesopotamia as their administrative cities: Babylon (former Babylonian Empire), Ecbatana (former Median Empire), and Susa (former Elamite Empire).

During Darius’s rule Jews continued to return to their traditional lands, reflected in the composite list in Ezra 2//Nehemiah 7. The restoration of the temple was renewed, leading now to a foundation-laying ceremony in 520 B.C. (see Ezra 3; Haggai; Zech. 4:6b-10a; 8:9-13) and a dedication in 515 (see Ezra 6). 41 This accomplishment is clearly linked to the benevolence of Darius in Ezra 5–6, but also to the initiatives of Zerubbabel, a Davidic scion who served as governor of Yehud, and Joshua, a Zadokite descendant who served as great priest, as well as the proclamation of the prophets Haggai and

41. Boda, “Flashforward.”
Someone once said, “The past is another country — they do things differently there.” At times, indeed, the Old Testament resembles another very different country. Maneuvering through levitical laws, bloodshed in Joshua, or Daniel’s apocalyptic visions, sincere readers often wonder what the Old Testament means and how it can be the Word of God. For several decades The New International Commentary on the Old Testament has helped countless people traverse this difficult literary terrain.

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