Letters of Kings about Votive Offerings, The God of Israel and the Aramaic Document in Ezra 4:8–6:18

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Abstract

Building on Bill's Arnold's thesis that the presence of Aramaic in Ezra presents a shift in perspective to an external point of view, Joshua Berman has theorized that Ezra 4:8—6:18 presents a narrator who is speaking from a gentile point of view as opposed to a Judean voice for the Hebrew that precedes and follows this Aramaic section. However, Berman's thesis does not account for all of the narration in this Aramaic text. The narrative verses that link the individual letters in this section indicate that the controlling voice for the overall narration is pro-Judean. These verses employ the Judeo-centric language and demonstrate that the author had a Judean source for much of the information he presents. Moreover, the narrative that connects the letters demonstrates the narrator's knowledge of the Judean prophets, their names, patronymics and office as prophets (5:1; 6:14), revealing his Judean perspective. Ultimately, this narrator reveals his viewpoint by placing the command of God next to the decrees of Persian kings (6:14). Thus, Ezra 4:8—6:18 is a single literary creation, a document that is the result of an archival search and is designed to persuade the reader that the Judeans ought to be allowed to build in Jerusalem. The inclusion of this Aramaic document in Ezra is the author/editor's way of demonstrating that even under foreign dominance, the Judeans will ultimately prosper because their God controls the events of the narrative and speaks through pro-Judean narrators even in a foreign tongue.
We alone will build the Temple for the Lord, the God of Israel, just as King Cyrus of Persia commanded us.” 4Then the local residents tried to discourage and frighten the people of Judah to keep them from their work. 5They bribed agents to work against them and to frustrate their plans. This went on during the entire reign of King Cyrus of Persia and lasted until King Darius of Persia took the throne. 6Darius reigned 521–486 b.c.

8#4:8 The original text of 4:8–6:18 is in Aramaic. Rehum the governor and Shimshai the court secretary wrote the letter, telling King Artaxerxes about the situation in Jerusalem. 9They greeted the king for all their colleagues—the judges and local leaders, the people of Tarpel, the Persians, the Babylonians, and the people of Erech and Susa (that is, Elam). These were Israel's enemies in the region, who resisted their reestablishment.

The enemy of God's people would try to stop the building of the temple. Noah had the same problem from the world around him when he was building the ark. Any person or group of people who decide to do something for God, will face opposition from the devil. Ezra 4:8 “Rehum the chancellor and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king in this sort:” This means the same letter as before; which, according to Jarchi, was sent in the name of Mithredath, Tabeel, and his company, and was edited by Rehum, master of words or sense, and written by Shimshai the scribe. But it was written rather in all their names. Rehum and Shimshai were not Hebrews.