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PROPHETS, PROPHECY,
AND PROPHETIC TEXTS
IN SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM

Edited by

Michael H. Floyd and Robert D. Haak



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HAGGAI, ZERUBBABEL, AND THE POLITICAL STATUS OF YEHUD: THE SIGNET RING IN HAGGAI 2:23

John Kessler

1. Introduction

The significance of Haggai's designation of Zerubbabel as Yahweh's signet ring (Hag 2:23) has long been a subject of interest and debate. The text reads as follows:

Hag 2:23

ביום ההוא נאסיהוה צבאות אקחך זרובבל בןשאלתיאל עבדי
נאסיהוה ושמתיך כחותם כידרך בחרתי נאם יהוה צבאות

On that day—oracle of Yahweh Sebaoth—I will take you Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, my servant—oracle of Yahweh Sebaoth—and I will make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you—oracle of Yahweh Sebaoth.

Closely related to it is Jer 22:24–25:

חייאני נאסיהוה כי אסיהוה בניו בןיהויקים מלך יהודה חותם עליך
ימיני כי משם אחקקך ונתחידך ביד מבקשי נפשך וביד אשריאתה יגור
מפניהם וביד נבוכדראצר מלך־בבל וביד הכשדים

As I live—oracle of Yahweh—if Coniah, son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah were a signet upon my right hand, I would tear you off from there, and I would give you into the hands of those who seek your life, and into the hands of those whom you fear—and into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, and into the hands of the Chaldeans!

Much of the discussion regarding Hag 2:23 is related to the socio-political context of Achaemenid Yehud and the book of Haggai's response¹ to the realities of the day. As such it has been investigated with reference to the book's attitude to matters including the future of the Davidic dynasty, the hopes it holds out

1. In the present study the terms "Haggai" and "the book of Haggai" will be used interchangeably. In contrast to scholars such as Rex A. Mason ("The Purpose of the 'Editorial Framework' of the Book of Haggai," *VT* 27 [1977]: 413–21), I do not believe it to be possible to disentangle the perspective of the prophet Haggai himself from that of his editors/redactors. The extreme brevity of the text and the numerous instances of verbal and thematic common ground between the sections commonly assigned to the oracular and redactional sections of the book make such an enterprise highly speculative. It seems to me to be far more fruitful to assume that the redactors sought to recontextualize Haggai's words for a slightly later period, and that any discordant element—should such have existed—between the earlier and later contexts would have been redactionally overridden. For a full discussion of the literary history of Haggai, see John Kessler, *The Book of Haggai: Prophecy and Society in Early Persian Yehud* (VTSup 91; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 31–57.

regarding the future political status of Yehud, and the role of Zerubbabel. In my view such issues can only be addressed when one takes into account the broader literary, socio-political, and hermeneutical dynamics related to the book of Haggai and its milieu of origin. I would suggest that there are four critical issues relative to the oracle in Hag 2:23 which must be brought to bear on its interpretation. These four areas are: (1) the political status of Yehud and the nature of Zerubbabel's authority in the broader context of Persian imperial policy; (2) the structural parallelism between the oracles in 2:6–9 and 2:21–23; (3) the hermeneutical tendency in Haggai to treat existing religious traditions in a highly generalized fashion; and (4) the source, meaning, and function of the imagery of the signet ring in 2:23 and its relationship to Jer 22:24–30. In the present study, I will first examine these four areas in turn, and then propose an understanding of the text's vision of the future role of Zerubbabel in light of them.

2. Political Status of Yehud

The political status of Yehud continues to be the object of scholarly debate. Put briefly, four major positions may be found in the current literature. The first, held by Alt, Galling, Petersen, and McEvenue,² and with some qualifications D. L. Smith³ and Weinberg,⁴ maintains that Judah was annexed to the province of Samaria by the Babylonians in 587 B.C.E., and that it remained under Samarian rule until the arrival of Nehemiah in 445 B.C.E. Weinberg and Smith nuance this view by affirming that Yehud was defined in an ethnic rather than a geographical manner. Thus ethnic enclaves consisting of communities of former Judean exiles, located in various regions of the territories of Judah and Benjamin, were ultimately recognized and given official political status by the Persian authorities, with Zerubbabel appointed as head.⁵ In a second opinion, Stern suggests that Yehud enjoyed a brief period of independence as a province at the time of Zerubbabel, the Persian-appointed governor, followed by a reversion to Samarian domination.⁶ Third, Williamson, Lemaire, Avigad, Carter, and Meyers propose the existence of a Persian province under the rule of an uninterrupted line of

2. Albrecht Alt, "Die Rolle Samarias bei der Entstehung des Judentums," in his *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volks Israel* (3 vols.; Munich: Beck, 1953), 2:313–37; Kurt Galling, *Studien zur Geschichte Israels im persischen Zeitalter* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1964); David L. Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1–8* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1985), 26–27; Sean E. McEvenue, "The Political Structure in Judah from Cyrus to Nehemiah," *CBQ* 43 (1981): 353–64. For a good summary of these arguments, see Lester L. Grabbe, *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian*. Vol. 1, *The Greek and Persian Periods* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 81–82.

3. Daniel L. Smith, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington, Ind.: Meyer-Stone Books, 1989), 114.

4. Joel P. Weinberg, "Zentral- und Partikulargewalt im achämenidischen Reich," *Klio* 59 (1977): 25–43.

5. Smith, *Landless*, 106–14 (112–13).

6. Ephraim Stern, "The Persian Empire and the Political and Social History of Palestine in the Persian Period," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*. Vol 1, *Introduction: The Persian Period* (ed. W. D. Davies and L. Finkelstein; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 70–87 (72–74).

Jewish governors from Sheshbazzar to Nehemiah and beyond.⁷ Liver, Kochman, Sacchi, Bianchi, and Niehr hold a fourth position that affirms that Judah/Yehud continued to be a vassal-kingdom ruled by a member of the Davidic line during the Babylonian and early Persian periods.⁸ A detailed analysis of this question is not possible here. However, in my opinion the most likely conclusion to be drawn from the relevant data (Yehud bullae, seals and coins; semantic data related to the term *phh*; biblical materials; Persian imperial policy) is that Yehud, a small province consisting of the territory of about 25 km outward from Jerusalem,⁹ constituted an independent province from the advent of Persian rule in the Levant, and that Zerubbabel served as its governor. Furthermore, it is probable that Mizpah was the capital of the province until the time of Nehemiah, when it was moved to Jerusalem.¹⁰

Four points, however, deserve special notice as they relate to Achaemenid polity in Yehud. First, Persian rule in the west quite frequently employed the “dynastic model” (as has been noted by Bianchi, Briant, and Lemaire),¹¹ with the

7. Hugh G. M. Williamson, “The Governors of Judah under the Persians,” *TynBul* 39 (1988): 59–82; André Lemaire, “Histoire et administration de la Palestine à l’époque perse,” in *La Palestine à l’époque perse* (ed. E.-M. Laperrousaz and A. Lemaire; Paris: Cerf, 1994), 11–53 (16–19); Nahman Avigad, *Bullae and Seals from a Post-Exilic Judean Archive* (Qedem 4; Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1976), 34; Eric M. Meyers, “The Shelomith Seal and the Judaean Restoration, Some Additional Considerations,” *Erlsr* 18 [*Nahman Avigad Volume*] (1985): 31–38; Nadav Na’aman, “Royal Vassals or Governors? On the Status of Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel in the Persian Empire,” *Hen* 22 (2000): 35–44; Ernest-Marie Laperrousaz, “Jérusalem à l’époque perse (étendue et statut),” *Transeu* 1 (1989): 55–66 (61–63).

8. J. Liver, “The Return from Babylon: Its Time and Scope,” *Erlsr* 5 [*Mazar Volume*] (1958): 90*; M. Kochman, “The Status and Extent of Judah in the Persian Period” (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1980), cited in Charles E. Carter, *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period* (JSOTSup 294; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 51; Paolo Sacchi, “L’esilio e la fine della monarchia davidica,” *Hen* 11 (1989): 131–48; idem, “Re Vassalli O Governatori? Una Discussione,” *Hen* 23 (2001): 147–52; Francesco Bianchi, “Le rôle de Zorobabel et la dynastie davidique en Judée du Ve siècle au IIe siècle av. J.-C.,” *Transeu* 7 (1994): 153–65; idem, *I superstiti della deportazione sono là nella provincia (Neemia 1,3). Ricerche storico-bibliche sulla Giudea in età neobabilonese e achemenide (586 a.C.–442 a.C.)* (AIONSup 82, 55; Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1995), 21–29, 95–97; Herbert Niehr, “Religio-Historical Aspects of the ‘Early Post-Exilic’ Period,” in *The Crisis of Israelite Religion: Transformation of Religious Tradition in Exilic and Post-Exilic Times* (ed. B. Becking and M. C. A. Korpel; OSt 62; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 228–44.

9. Lemaire, “Histoire et administration de la Palestine,” 21.

10. As recently suggested by Oded Lipschits, “The Achaemenid Imperial Policy and the Status of Jerusalem in the Fifth Century BCE,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (ed. O. Lipschits and M. Oeming; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, forthcoming); and also André Lemaire, “Nabonidus in Arabia and Judah in the Neo-Babylonian Period,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (ed. O. Lipschits and J. Blenkinsopp; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 285–98 (291–92).

11. Bianchi, “Rôle de Zorobabel,” 153–65; Pierre Briant, “Contrainte militaire, dépendance rurale et exploitation des territoires en Asie achéménide,” in *Rois, tributes et paysans: études sur les formations tributaires du Moyen-Orient ancien* (Centre de Recherche d’Histoire Ancienne 43; Annales Littéraires de l’Université de Besançon 269; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1982), 199–225; André Lemaire, “Zorobabel et la Judée à la lumière de l’épigraphie (fin du Ve s. av. J.-C.),” *RB* 103 (1996): 48–57 (53–54).

transition from Babylonian to Persian rule, whereby members of former ruling elites or dynasties were reinstated and placed in positions of authority and as such promoted Persian imperial interests. Thus Zerubbabel's Davidic heritage posed no inherent threat to the Persian crown, but rather was completely consistent with imperial policy. Second, on any of the above reconstructions of Yehud's status, but especially on the third view, Zerubbabel's position was clearly of complete subordination to and dependence upon Persian authority. Third, as Briant¹² and Lemaire¹³ have noted, Persian rule in the west was asymmetrical in that a variety of political sub-units existed at the same time, including tribal confederations, provinces, and petty kingdoms. In this context, Haggai's words to Zerubbabel, which merely hint that Yehud and its Davidic governor Zerubbabel will somehow experience a future elevation, need not be viewed as inflammatory or seditious. Persian imperial policy was tolerant of a degree of ebb and flow in the relative fortunes of the provinces and petty kingdoms it ruled, provided that imperial policy—especially the payment of tribute—was not affected. Furthermore, as Briant has noted, “a lively consciousness persisted in many territories of belonging to an ethno-cultural community whose principles and goals were opposed to those of the Persians.”¹⁴ Persian imperial policy specifically permitted the elites it installed to perpetuate their own traditions and sense of identity.¹⁵ Fourth and finally, as I have sought to demonstrate elsewhere, Persian rule was well entrenched in Yehud by the second year of Darius, and Haggai's words to the governor ought not to be read as an incitement to participate in the political instability which characterized the time immediately following Darius' accession.¹⁶

In sum, then, Haggai's words are addressed to the subordinate ruler of a petty province in the Levant. The choice of a governor who was a descendant of the former ruling elite (i.e. the Davidic line) was a deliberate and conscious one on the part of the Great King, and fully consistent with Persian policy. Zerubbabel, for his part, was expected to be a loyal promoter of imperial interests. The eschatological language¹⁷ in Haggai cannot be read as an incitement to active

12. Pierre Briant, “Pouvoir central et polycentrisme culturel dans l'empire achéménide: quelques réflexions et suggestions,” in *Sources, Structures and Synthesis: Proceedings of the Groningen 1983 Achaemenid History Workshop* (ed. H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg; Achaemenid History 1; Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1987), 1–31 (2).

13. Lemaire, “Zorobabel et la Judée,” 55; idem, “L'exploitation des sources ouest-sémitiques (araméennes, phéniciennes, hébraïques et minéennes),” in *Recherches récentes sur l'Empire achéménide* (Topoi orient-occident Supplement 1; Lyon: Maison de l'Orient Méditerranéen, 1997), 305–32 (308).

14. Briant, “Pouvoir central,” 15. The translation of this and all other non-English citations in this article are my own.

15. Briant, “Pouvoir central,” 15.

16. John Kessler, “Second Year of Darius and the Prophet Haggai,” *Transeu* 5 (1992): 63–84.

17. As Peter R. Bedford (*Temple Restoration in Early Achaemenid Judah* [JSJSup 65; Leiden: Brill, 2001], 260) notes, Haggai's vision of the future may indeed be closer to “historical recurrence” than “eschatology” in that what is envisaged is an idealized projection of the monarchical past. However, I feel that it is preferable to use the term “eschatological,” in that the reconstitution of the

rebellion against the Persian crown,¹⁸ nor can any other source be adduced as an indication of disloyalty on Zerubbabel's part.¹⁹

3. *The Parallelism between Haggai 2:6–9 and 2:21–23*

Haggai may be viewed as consisting of four major divisions—1:1–15; 2:1–9; 2:10–19; 2:20–23—which follow a loose a/b/a/b configuration.²⁰ The “a” sections deal with matters which arise out of some failure on the part of the community which results in a rift between Yahweh and his people,²¹ and employ various forms frequently used in prophetic oracles of reproach or condemnation (*Mahnwort*, *Scheltwort*, *Diskussionswort*).²² Similarly they use language evocative of the maledictions of Deut 28 (e.g. Hag 1:6//Deut 28:38 and Lev 26:26; Hag 1:11//Deut 28:18, 23, 51; Hag 2:17//Deut 28:22).²³ As well, these sections offer hope to the community if it amends its ways (1:8; 2:18). The “b” sections, 2:1–9 and 21–23, have a different tone. They offer hope to a discouraged population, use forms such as the Formula of Divine Assistance (2:5), and feature motifs which include Yahweh's election (2:23), the ingathering of the wealth of the nations (2:7–8), and Yahweh's universal rule (2:6–7, 21–22). Furthermore, 2:6–9 closely parallel 2:21–23. Both sections are introduced by temporal phrases evocative of Yahweh's coming decisive intervention. Haggai 2:6 begins with the phrase עֵדָה מֵעַתָּה הִיא (which I understand as meaning, “once again, in a little

past realities occurs subsequent to a decisive intervention of Yahweh (Hag 2:6–9, 21–23) and results in a state of affairs which greatly surpasses that which went before.

18. Kessler, “The Second Year of Darius,” 63–84; idem, *Book of Haggai*, 82–85.

19. This despite a long-standing interpretive tradition assuming a rebellion under Zerubbabel; cf. Leroy Waterman, “The Camouflaged Purge of Three Messianic Conspirators,” *JNES* 13 (1954): 73–78; and more recently Elias J. Bickerman, “En marge de l'écriture,” *RB* 88 (1981): 19–23. Such a hypothesis has been seriously questioned by a succession of scholars. Cf. Aage Bentzen, “Quelques remarques sur le mouvement messianique parmi les Juifs aux environs de l'an 520 avant Jésus-Christ,” *RHPR* 10 (1930): 493–503; and Peter R. Ackroyd, “Two Historical Problems of the Early Persian Period,” *JNES* 17 (1958): 13–27. Waterman and Bickerman's hypothesis relies heavily (1) on the assumption that the dates in Haggai do not use an accession year system, and (2) on the biblical record's silence about the fate of Zerubbabel. On the first point, cf. Hans Walter Wolff, *Haggai: A Commentary* (trans. M. Kohl; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 76; Kessler, *Book of Haggai*, 80–88. Regarding the second point, it would seem unlikely that the governorship in Yehud would have passed to Elnathan, Zerubbabel's son-in-law (cf. André Lemaire, Review of N. Avigad, *Bullae and Seals from a Post-Exilic Archive, Syria* 54 [1977]: 129–31; Meyers, “Shelomith Seal”) had the latter been engaged in overt rebellion. Cf. also the arguments in Bedford, *Temple Restoration*, 230–37.

20. Kessler, *Book of Haggai*, 251; cf. pp. 113–14 for a discussion on the relationship of the brief report of the people's response in 1:12–15 to the oracular material in 1:2–11.

21. In 1:2–11 the failure is clearly the community's negligence vis-à-vis the rebuilding of the temple. In 2:10–19 the problem in view is the ritual defilement of Jerusalem altar, and consequently the people and their offerings. For a defense of this position, as well as an analysis of alternative proposals, cf. Kessler, *Book of Haggai*, 206–18.

22. Cf. Wim A. M. Beuken, *Haggai-Sacharja 1–8: Studien zur Überlieferungsgeschichte der frühachexilischen Prophetie* (SSN 10; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1967), 19; Odil H. Steck, “Zu Haggai I, 2–11,” *ZAW* 83 (1971): 355–79 (367).

23. Cf. Kessler, *Book of Haggai*, 154.

while"²⁴), while in 2:23 the phrase בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא occurs, a formula widely used in prophetic literature (cf. Isa 2:11; 11:11; Jer 46:10; Ezek 38:18; Hos 2:18 [ET 16]; Joel 4:18 [ET 3:18]; Amos 9:11; Mic 5:9 [ET 10]; Zech 3:10). Furthermore, both employ the motif of Yahweh shaking the heavens and earth, causing signs and portents in the cosmos, which make the nations tremble in panic. However the most significant similarity for the present discussion is the fact that both pericopes use the language of *present acceptability* despite *inferior or humble status*. Thus in 2:1–9 the population experiences discouragement at the seemingly unimpressive appearance of the temple. Haggai 2:21–23 contains a similar motif. Zerubbabel's status and dominion were grossly inferior when compared to his Davidic forebears. Nevertheless, despite his subaltern position, Yahweh was with him and, like the temple, his future would be glorious.

4. *The Hermeneutics of Generalization*

It has been observed that the book of Haggai uses a wide pastiche of Israelite religious traditions and motifs.²⁵ Such elements include the vocabulary and themes found in various oracles against the nations (Hag 2:22; cf. Jer 46:16; Isa 13:4; 23:11), the traditions of the exodus and Sea of Reeds (Hag 2:5, 22; cf. Exod 14:9, 23; 15:1, 19, 21), the destruction of Cities of the Plain (Hag 2:22; cf. Gen 19:21, 29), futility curses, and other Deuteronomistic motifs.²⁶ Furthermore Haggai employs several notions associated with Zion theology (2:6–9, 20–23), including the pilgrimage of the nations to Zion (cf. Mic 4:1–4; Zech 14:16–19); the presence of the wealth of the nations in the temple (cf. Isa 60:5; Ezek 39:9–10; Joel 4:5–7 [ET 3:5–7]; Zech 14:14); the mutual annihilation of the nations' troops (cf. Isa 19:2; Jer 46:9–12, 16; Ezek 38:19–21); and Yahweh's universal reign of peace (Hag 2:9; cf. Mic 4:1–2; Isa 2:1–3; Zech 14:16–19.²⁷ However, the consistent fashion in which the book of Haggai deliberately generalizes the traditions it employs is frequently overlooked. By this I mean that in Haggai certain details or specific elements of a motif—elements which may appear in other prophetic texts—are generalized, attenuated, or obfuscated.

Two instances of such generalization may be cited here to illustrate this tendency in Haggai. The first concerns Yahweh's "eschatological" battle against the nations in defense of his people.²⁸ Haggai 2:6–9 and 2:21–23 clearly use several

24. Cf. Kessler, *Book of Haggai*, 160, 173–75, for a fuller discussion.

25. Theophane Chary, *Aggée-Zacharie, Malachie* (SB; Paris: J. Gabalda et Cie, 1969), 34; Petersen, *Haggai*, 101; Wilhelm Rudolph, *Haggai, Sacharja 1–8, 9–14, Malachi* (KAT 13/4; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1976), 53.

26. Cf. Kessler, *Book of Haggai*, 142–47, for a fuller discussion of the Deuteronomistic language in 1:12–15.

27. Kessler, *Book of Haggai*, 224–25.

28. This is a stock element in Zion theology. For a fuller treatment of it, cf. Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (trans. D. M. G. Stalker; 2 vols; Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1965), 2:293–94; Moshe Weinfeld, "Zion and Jerusalem as Religious and Political Capital: Ideology and Utopia," in *The Poet and the Historian* (ed. R. E. Friedman; HSS 26; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1983),

of the stock phrases associated with this motif. These include: (1) the shaking of the cosmos with terrifying and catastrophic portents (Hag 2:6; cf. Isa 24:17–23; Ezek 38:19–20; Joel 4:15 [ET 3:15]; Nah 1:5; Ps 46:3, 7 [ET 46:2, 6]); (2) terror and panic among the nations (Hag 2:7; cf. Isa 19:16; Ezek 38:19–20; Joel 4:15–16 [ET 3:15–16]; Zech 14:13; Ps 46:7 [ET 46:6]); (3) the annihilation of the military strength of the nations (Hag 2:22; cf. Ezek 38:22–23; Joel 4:9–14 [ET 3:9–14]; Mic 7:15–17; Zech 14:3, 12–13); (4) the mutual annihilation and slaughter of the nations' armies as each attacks the other (Hag 2:22; cf. Isa 19:2; Ezek 38:21; Zech 14:13). However, what is most distinctive about Haggai's particular use of this eschatological battle motif is the highly generalized fashion in which it is employed. This is seen in three ways.

First, no location is presented for the battle. This contrasts with Zech 14, where the battle is seen as taking place in Jerusalem, or Ezek 38–39 in which the foreign armies are found on the "mountains of Israel" (38:8) and attack the entire community dwelling in the land (38:10–16).²⁹ Haggai, on the other hand, sketches a conflict that is both more extensive and less detailed than the one described in the texts cited above.³⁰ The nations and the kingdoms of 2:7 and 22 are neither identified nor described. Haggai speaks of the overthrowing Gentile power in general. While our prophet may on some level be alluding to the Persian Empire,³¹ this does not exhaust his perspective. Second, the details of the battle are vague. The slaughter of the nations' armies is described in highly general terms. They are simply said to tremble with fear and fall by each other's hand. This contrasts with the much greater detail found in Ezek 38–39 with its description of the nations who comprise the attacking armies (38:1–2, 5–6), their inner thoughts (38:10–12), their destruction via sulphur (38:22) and fire (39:5), and their ultimate burial place (39:11–12). Zechariah 14 similarly enters into detail regarding the pillaging of Jerusalem (14:2), the personal intervention of Yahweh in the battle (14:3–4), and the earthquake and escape from the city (14:5). Third, the scope of the conflict is very broad. In Ezek 38:21 and Zech 14:13 the siege of Yehud and Jerusalem is in view and it is the besieging troops who kill one another. Haggai 2:22 uses the same language, without any explicit mention of a siege. It is the armies of all the nations of the earth³² who annihilate themselves in the panic of that catastrophic day. Similarly, in contrast to Zech 14:5–6, where

75–115; J. J. M. Roberts, "The Davidic Origin of the Zion Tradition," *JBL* 92 (1973): 329–44; Paul D. Hanson, "Zechariah 9 and the Recapitulation of an Ancient Ritual Pattern," *JBL* 92 (1973): 37–59.

29. Joel's enigmatic reference to the "valley of Jehoshaphat" (4:2 [ET 3:2]) may reflect a similar kind of generalization; cf. Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 108–9.

30. However, Ezek 38:6, like Haggai, may imply a more widespread conflagration.

31. On this, cf. Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 142; Karl-Martin Beyse, *Serubbabel und die Königserwartungen der Propheten Haggai und Sacharja: Eine historische und traditions-geschichtliche Untersuchung* (AzTh 1/48; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1972), 55–56.

32. As Alfons Deissler (*Les petits prophètes* [2 vols.; La Sainte Bible 8/1; Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1964], 2:497) comments, "mamlokot designates, in a very general way, the various powers other than Israel."

an earthquake provides a way of escape for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, or Ezek 38:17–23, where the earthquakes and other plagues frustrate and terrorize the conquering armies, the cosmic perturbations of nature in 2:6–9, 20–23 have a universal character.³³ Thus when Haggai employs elements of the battle motif, he universalizes and generalizes the tradition he uses.³⁴

The second area where Haggai's generalizing tendencies can be seen is in the motif of the presence of the wealth of the nations in Jerusalem (Hag 2:6–9).³⁵ This is best seen when Hag 2:6–9 is compared with other texts which employ similar themes. In Mic 4:1–4 and Isa 2:1–4 the nations come to Zion to have their disputes arbitrated by Yahweh. In Zech 14:1, 14 and Ezek 39:10 the Gentiles' wealth comes into the city as Judah gathers up the spoils of war.³⁶ The same is true of Mic 4:13. In Zech 14:16–19 the nations come to celebrate the feast of booths.³⁷ Isaiah 60 describes in detail the coming of the nations, and their presentation of their wealth and offerings, for the service of Yahweh.³⁸ All of this stands in stark contrast to Hag 2:6–9, where the presence of the nations' wealth in Jerusalem is stated, but not explained. No details are provided as to whether this wealth is the spoil of war (cf. Mic 4:11–13; Ezek 38–39; Zech 12–14), the offerings of pilgrims (cf. Isa 60:5; Zech 8:20–23), or the payment of tribute (cf. Isa 60:11–12). The reason that only this one element of the traditional complex of Zion theology is mentioned in Haggai would appear to be to provide

33. Petersen, *Haggai*, 67 observes: "Haggai has used this traditional language in a distinctive way. In Haggai the shaking of the earth is not a reaction to Yahweh's appearance per se but rather is linked to new activity of Yahweh on behalf of his people. Further distinguishing this language from typical theophanic descriptions is the scope of such violent agitation. It is no longer just the mountains which quake. The entire cosmos vibrates, as indicated by the two polar sets: earth—heavens, sea—dry land."

34. This phenomenon has also been noted by Samuel Amsler (Samuel Amsler, André Lacoque, and René Vuilleumier, *Aggée—Zacharie 1–8, Zacharie 9–14, Malachi* [2d ed.; CAT 11c; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1988], p. 32): "The universal shaking which is announced has no precedents. The prophets had often described Yahweh's intervention in catastrophic terms, but never as is the case here, in terms of a shaking which was cosmic and universal in scope." Cf. Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 25B; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1987), 53.

35. On the origins of this theme and its use in the ancient Near East, cf. Weinfeld, "Zion," *passim*, and von Rad, *Theology*, 2:294–97.

36. Note the explicit mention of gold and silver here as in Zech 14:1 and Hag 2:8. However, the order of the elements in the two texts differs. Haggai likely reflects the traditional order in pre-exilic Hebrew and the ancient Near East in general; cf. Ursula Schattner-Rieser, "L'hébreu postexilique," in Laperrousaz and Lemaire, eds., *La Palestine à l'époque perse*, 189–224 (218). The reversal of the traditional order in Zech 14:14 may reflect the widespread tendency in the post-exilic period to reverse the order of certain fixed phrases; cf. Schattner-Rieser, "L'hébreu," 218–19.

37. It must be admitted that there is no explicit mention of the presentation of offerings at the temple, however this may be reasonably inferred. A similar inference may well be made with reference to Mic 4:1–4 and Isa 2:1–4, which view the nations coming to Zion to have their disputes arbitrated by Yahweh.

38. Cf. von Rad, *Theology*, 2:294–97. Similar motifs are found in Isa 49:8–21 where the Jews of the Diaspora arrive at Jerusalem, carried on the shoulders of the *goyim*, as well as in Isa 45:14–15; cf. von Rad, *Theology*, 2:295.

reassurance for the builders that, despite their lack of material resources for the adornment of the temple, Yahweh would indeed supply such wealth, via the nations. Haggai offers no further detail beyond this one key point.

In Haggai, then, we note a redactional tendency whereby traditions which contain multiple elements configured in a variety of ways in other prophetic texts are alluded to in a very general fashion. What is more, in Haggai, frequently one element of the broader complex or configuration of traditions is brought to the fore. From a rhetorical point of view the most likely explanation for this phenomenon is that it serves to focus the reader or hearer's attention on the one central element of the tradition which is essential to the prophet's message while casting other elements of the traditional complex into the background.³⁹ As noted above, in 2:6–9 the emphasis is placed on the glorification of the temple. It is significant for our purposes here that the same dynamic can be seen in 2:23 vis-à-vis Zerubbabel. Haggai 2:21–23 employs a constellation of highly evocative terms such as “the shaking of the heavens and earth,” “going down by the hand of one's brother,” “servant,” “to make as a signet ring,” and “to choose.” Yet, these terms retain a rather stylized and schematic quality. Nevertheless the central motif is clear: Zerubbabel will experience exaltation at the hand of Yahweh. However, as we shall see, even this central assertion is cast in a generalized manner.

5. The Nature and Purpose of the Signet Ring Imagery in Jeremiah 22:24 and Haggai 2:23

Quite frequently, the analysis of the use of the signet ring imagery in 2:23 proceeds in the following fashion. First, the biblical and archaeological data regarding seals and sealing are surveyed. It is pointed out that the term סֶהָרִי appears fourteen times in the Hebrew Bible.⁴⁰ It is similarly observed that signets could be worn around the neck or placed in rings. Signets were closely guarded, since each was distinct and could be used as a validating signature by its owner.⁴¹ From there the discussion passes to the use of the term in Hag 2:23. It is pointed out that its use is clearly figurative, as is evident from the presence of כ (“as”) preceding it.⁴² From this point, most exegetes attempt to understand this text in terms of the symbolism of the signet ring. Commentators consequently try to identify which nuance of סֶהָרִי forms the basis of the simile. Is it: (1) the highly personal and intimate nature of the relationship between the seal and its owner,

39. For a fuller development of this concept, cf. Kessler, *Book of Haggai*, 239–40.

40. Gen 38:18; Exod 28:11, 21, 36; 39:6, 14, 30; 1 Kgs 21:8; Job 38:14; 41:7 [ET 15]; Cant 8:6 (twice); Jer 22:24; Hag 2:23.

41. On seals and sealings and the use of signet rings, cf. Wolter H. Rose, *Zemah and Zerubbabel: Messianic Expectations in the Early Postexilic Period* (JSOTSup 304; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 218–30, with bibliography. Cf. also McGuire Gibson and Robert D. Biggs, eds., *Seals and Sealings in the Ancient Near East* (BMes 6; Malibu: Udena, 1977).

42. As Rose, *Zemah*, 238, accurately notes; cf. Jöüon §133g for an excellent discussion of the range of similarity implied by כ .

and its value in the latter's eyes (Meyers and Meyers; Rose; cf. Cant 8:6);⁴³ (2) the seal as a symbol of authority (Verhoef);⁴⁴ or (3) the giving of seals by a superior to a subordinate to indicate the latter's authority either to represent the former (Petersen)⁴⁵ or to reflect his or her subordination to the superior (Wolff, Chary)?⁴⁶ Allusions are then made to Jer 22:24 where similar imagery is used (there the image is present in the form of a metaphor embedded in a conditional clause, which may be understood as real or hypothetical).

In my opinion, despite the fact that this line of reasoning has indeed yielded much useful data, it does not adequately render the thought in Hag 2:23, in that it does not take into account two critical considerations. The first concerns the reason for which Haggai uses the image of the signet. The second concerns the specific rhetorical trope which lies at the root of the text in both Haggai and Jeremiah. Let us examine these two issues in turn.

Regarding the first consideration, it is essential to observe that the use of the signet ring imagery in Hag 2:23 is not fortuitous, but highly intentional. Its purpose is to "correct" or "update" Jer 22:24 in light of the circumstances of Early Persian Yehud. The fate of the House of David and the theological traditions associated with it were clearly open-ended questions after the exile of Jehoiachin, and one to which various traditions offered responses. This is especially true of the Deuteronomistic History and Jeremiah.⁴⁷ R. Carroll and Y. Goldman have suggested that the redactional activity in Jer 22:24–30 reflects a postexilic debate concerning the authority of Zerubbabel and the Davidic line, however they reach opposite conclusions. Carroll affirms that in Jer 22:30 a redactional extension is appended to the judgment upon Jehoiachin in 22:24, so as to *exclude* Jehoiachin's descendants (i.e. Zerubbabel) from any future political leadership. This extension, he argues, originated from an anti-Zerubbabel faction.⁴⁸ Goldman by contrast sees Jer 22:26–30 as containing several slight redactional modifications to the original words of Jeremiah. These additions served to *limit* the judgment on Jehoiachin and his family to those born in Judah. This would consequently allow those who venerated the words of Jeremiah to accept the

43. Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai*, 70; Rose, *Zemah*, 233–38 (233–34), with extensive bibliography.

44. Verhoef, *Haggai*, 147.

45. Petersen, *Haggai*, 104.

46. Wolff, *Haggai*, 83–84; Theophane Chary, *Les prophètes et le culte à partir de l'exil* (Bibliothèque de théologie; Série III, Théologie biblique 3; Paris: Desclée et Cie, 1955), 135.

47. The discussion of these issues has generated an enormous amount of literature; cf. recently, Bedford, *Temple Restoration*, 72–83; Donald F. Murray, "Of all the Years the Hopes—or Fears? Jehoiachin in Babylon (2 Kings 25:27–30)," *JBL* 120 (2001): 245–65. Cf. also Peter R. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration: A Study of Hebrew Thought of the Sixth Century B.C.* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), 58–61, 78–83; J. G. McConville, *Judgment and Promise: An Interpretation of the Book of Jeremiah* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1993), 54–60; Ernest W. Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles: A Study of the Prose Tradition in the Book of Jeremiah* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970); Yohanan Goldman, *Prophétie et royauté au retour de l'exil* (OBO 118; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992).

48. Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 441–43.

leadership of the Davidide Zerubbabel, who, being born in exile, would not have fallen under Jeremiah's condemnation. From Goldman's perspective, the outlook of Hag 2:23 and that of the redactor of Jer 22:24–30 are of a piece.⁴⁹ However one understands the intention of Jer 22:24–30, the allusion to Jer 22:24–30 in Hag 2:23 cannot be understood apart from early Persian-period reflection on the future of the Davidic line. What is more, if for no other reason, historical experience itself, as manifested in the Persian appointment of Zerubbabel as governor, would have raised the issue. Thus Pomykala's suggestion that Haggai's language would have still been appropriate even if Zerubbabel had not been of Davidic stock may be true, but it misses the point.⁵⁰ The metaphor of the donning of the signet in 2:23 was chosen precisely because it served as a vehicle to contrast the diverse characters and fates of the two Davidides. As Rex Mason aptly states,

The balance of probability (it is no more) seems to me to tilt toward a belief that Haggai thought, [*sic* punctuation] that when Yahweh began his universal reign in the completed temple, Zerubbabel would succeed to royal status. His Davidic descendant [*sic* descent?], and especially the fact that Jehoiachin was the last Davidic king, the reversal of whose banishment is here suggested by the use of the rare word 'signet ring,' seem more than coincidence.⁵¹

Put another way, the use of the signet imagery was not one option chosen out of a vast range of possibilities. Rather it was taken up specifically because of its presence in the Jeremianic tradition. In all probability, the tradition cried out for further reflection once the Davidide Zerubbabel was reinstated by the Persians.⁵² How did the presence of Zerubbabel square with Jeremiah's words of rejection directed against Jehoiachin and his descendants?⁵³ How could those who treasured those words—possibly the non-exiled community, as opposed to the returnees⁵⁴—follow the leadership of Zerubbabel (a member of the returnee

49. Goldman, *Prophétie*, 231–35.

50. Kenneth E. Pomykala, *The Davidic Dynasty Tradition in Early Judaism: Its History and Significance for Messianism* (SBLEJL 7; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 49, cited in Rose, *Zemah*, 239.

51. Rex A. Mason "The Messiah in the Postexilic Old Testament Literature," in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (ed. J. Day; JSOTSup 270; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 338–64 (342).

52. Here I am presupposing that the ideas reflected in Jer 22:24 antedate those of Hag 2:23. However, even if one were to argue that both texts were the product of the same hand at work in the early Achaemenid period, my point would not be affected.

53. Zerubbabel's father is named Shealtiel in Hag 1:1, 12, 14; 2:2; Ezra 3:2, 8; 5:2; Neh 12:1; Matt 1:12 and Luke 3:27, whereas 1 Chr 3:19 lists Pedaiah as his father; cf. Kessler, *Book of Haggai*, 119–20, with bibliography, for a survey of proposed explanations. In any case he is a Davidide and descendant of Jehoiachin.

54. Christopher Seitz has pointed out that the book of Jeremiah contains a significant strand which attributes theological legitimacy to the community which remained in the land ("The Crisis of Interpretation over the Meaning and Purpose of the Exile: A Redactional Study of Jeremiah xxi–xliv," *VT* 35 [1985]: 78–97 [79–81]). However see the comments of Bustenay Oded, "Exile–Homeland Relations during the Exilic Period and Restoration," in *Teshūrôt LaAvishur. Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East, in Hebrew and Semitic Languages* (Festschrift Yitzhak Avishur; ed. M. Heltzer and M. Malul; Tel Aviv–Jaffa: Archaeological Center Publications, 2004), 153–60 (158*).

group) in the temple reconstruction project? The critical interpretive question vis-à-vis Hag 2:23 is thus not “How is Zerubbabel like a signet ring?” but rather “How does Hag 2:23 develop the ideas of Jer 22:24–30?”

With this in mind, we come to the second question: What precisely is the literary trope or figure of speech we are examining? As noted above, many commentators treat it as a simple metaphor (in Jeremiah) or simile (in Haggai). The question they then pose is one of the *territo comparitionis* between Zerubbabel and the signet: On what basis is Zerubbabel compared to a signet? However, a closer examination of these texts, specifically with reference to the purpose for the use of the imagery (i.e. to contrast Zerubbabel and Jehoiachin, in light of the situation in early Persian Yehud), reveals that the true figure of speech at issue is a *personification* of which the simile or metaphor of the signet is only a part. The real trope consists of the personification of Yahweh, who is likened to the owner of a signet who, in one case, in utter anger and disgust, despite its preciousness to him, removes his signet and throws it away,⁵⁵ and who, in the other, due to changed circumstances, picks up that which was formerly discarded and puts it on again.

6. *Haggai 2:23 and the Future of Zerubbabel and Yehud*

With these considerations in mind, then, we may turn to 2:21–23. In v. 21, the prophet is commanded to speak to Zerubbabel, whose patronymic is not mentioned (cf. 1:1), but who is addressed in his role as “governor of Yehud” underlining the official mandate he holds from the Persian throne. The oracle (vv. 21b–23) has a poetic and rhythmic structure.⁵⁶ It contains a tripartite movement toward the centre of interest. First, v. 21b describes the profound destabilization of the cosmos (“I am about to cause the heavens and earth to tremble”; cf. 2:6). Second, in v. 22, the prophet moves, as in vv. 6–7, from the terrifying upheaval in the natural world to its effects upon humankind.⁵⁷ The nations’ ability to make war will be destroyed as their armies annihilate one another. As noted above, these words are saturated with allusions drawn from a great diversity of Israelite religious traditions discernible in a wide variety of texts—prophetic,

55. In Jer 22:24 Yahweh affirms that even if Jehoiachin were as precious to him as a signet, he would still reject him. Cf. Rose, *Zemah*, 238. If the text is taken as a real condition, it serves to highlight the pathos involved in the rejection of Jehoiachin and the judgment of the nation. The situation is so grave that, in spite of the preciousness of king and nation in his eyes, Yahweh would nevertheless execute his judgment (cf. the contrasting result in Hos 11:6, if this verse is understood to be a renunciation or attenuation of judgment). If the condition is hypothetical and contrary to fact (i.e. Jehoiachin is not as precious as a signet), then the sense of the statement is the certainty of Yahweh’s judgment. Taken this way the meaning of the phrase is: “even if you were as precious as my signet (and you are not) I would still throw you away, therefore your doom is assured.”

56. Wolff, *Haggai*, 99.

57. Hag 2:7 manifests a similar progression. Cf. the structure in 1:3–9 and 2:15–19 where the misfortunes experienced are first described, then followed by the affirmation that Yahweh was their author.

narrative, and liturgical.⁵⁸ Third, the oracle moves to its central concern: the destiny of the governor of Yehud. In the oracle, the prophet proclaims that which Zerubbabel is now (Yahweh's servant), and that which Yahweh will do in the future (take him and set him as a signet). Zerubbabel's present status vis-à-vis Yahweh is expressed in the vocative parenthesis, "O Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, my servant." The term עֶבֶד is associated with several important individuals and groups in Israelite traditions:⁵⁹ Abraham (Gen 26:24); Isaac and Jacob (Exod 32:13); Moses (Num 12:7–8; Deut 34:5, and many times in the Deuteronomistic History); Joshua (Judg 2:8; Josh 1:1, 7); Job (Job 1:8; 2:3); and especially David (2 Sam 7:5, 8; 1 Kgs 11:13; 14:8; 2 Kgs 19:34). The term is also used with reference to Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 25:9; 27:6; 43:10) as well as the nation of Israel (Isa 41:8–9; 44:1; 48:20; Jer 30:10; 46:27–28; Ezek 28:25; 37:25).⁶⁰ Indeed, the narrative summary in Hag 1:12–14 includes Zerubbabel as one whose spirit is stirred by Yahweh through the prophetic word.⁶¹ Therefore, the implication of this designation is likely that Zerubbabel, as political head of the community and active participant in the temple's reconstruction, was acting as one who stood in continuity with those who had chosen to ally themselves with Yahweh and his purposes in the past.⁶² Yahweh is declaring his full approbation of Zerubbabel, governor of Yehud, community leader, and temple builder.

Yahweh's future purposes for Zerubbabel are expressed by the verbs "I will take you" and "I will set you as a signet ring." These two imperfects, both of which have clearly future referents, are to be considered as forming part of one single broader action on Yahweh's part. The verb לָקַח when used with Yahweh as subject frequently designates the setting apart of groups or individuals. It is employed in this sense regarding Israel as a nation (Exod 6:7; Deut 4:20), the Levites (Num 3:12; 8:16; Ps 68:19 [ET 18]), Aaron (Lev 8:2), Joshua (Num 27:18, 22), David (2 Sam 7:8; Ps 78:70), and Amos (Amos 7:15).⁶³ As Rose points out, in many instances the individual or group thus designated is "taken" and appointed to a new position or responsibility.⁶⁴

58. Chary (*Aggée*, 34) describes it as being made up of commonly used traditional images ("clichés traditionnels").

59. Cf. the excellent and comprehensive chart in Rose, *Zemah*, 210–11. My earlier critique of Rose's data (Kessler, *Book of Haggai*, 228 n. 58) was inaccurate. Cf. also the survey in Janet A. Tollington, *Tradition and Innovation in Haggai and Zechariah 1–8* (JSOTSup 150; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 139–41.

60. On these last references, cf. Tollington, *Tradition*, 139. The literature on the Servant of Yahweh in Isa 40–55 is immense. See recently, Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah* (OTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 2001), 409–23, with brief bibliography. See also the earlier study of Christopher R. North, *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah: An Historical and Critical Study* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956).

61. On this interpretation of the relationship between the activity of Yahweh and the words of Haggai, cf. Kessler, *Book of Haggai*, 140–53.

62. Tollington (*Tradition*, 139–41) appropriately notes that the motifs of obedience, faithfulness, and intimacy are to be found in the use of the term in the Isaianic and Deuteronomistic traditions, as well as in Wisdom and other diverse historical traditions.

63. Cf. the fuller discussion in Rose, *Zemah*, 216–18, and Tollington, *Tradition*, 137.

64. Rose, *Zemah*, 217.

Yahweh's "taking" of Zerubbabel is further qualified by the phrase "I will set you as my signet ring." The verb קָטַף carries a nuance similar to that of לָקַח , and refers to the installation of an individual in a specific role or position (cf. Exod 1:11; 18:21; Deut 1:13; 1 Sam 8:12; 18:13; 1 Chr 26:10).⁶⁵ As noted above, the phrase "I will set you as my signet ring" must be understood as constituting further reflection on the ideology of the rejection of Jehoiachin and his house expressed in Jer 22:24–30. Furthermore, it is not to be understood a stand-alone simile, but rather a component of the broader trope of Yahweh's rejection of Jehoiachin, on one hand, and his favor bestowed upon Zerubbabel, and by extension Yehud, on the other.

Clearly the critical interpretive question at this point is that which may be known or implied from Haggai's use of the personification regarding Yahweh and his signet in the realm of historical experience. In Jer 22:24–30 the historical referent of the rejected signet is the exile of Jehoiachin and his family, their death in exile, and the exclusion of his immediate progeny from future royal tenure.⁶⁶ It is important to take into account the full context of the passage in Jeremiah. Chapter 21 begins a denunciation of Judah's last kings.⁶⁷ Jeremiah 21:11–12 contains a generalized warning to the Davidic rulers: they must administer justice or be destroyed. The sins of Shallum are not listed (22:10–11), but his fate situates him under condemnation. Jehoiakim's evils are explicitly mentioned in 22:13–19. Jehoiachin's sins are only referred to in passing (22:28) but he appears to be no better than his predecessors. Yahweh's rejection of Jehoiachin, symbolized through the casting off of the signet in v. 24, is thus a result of his unworthiness. Haggai 2:23 reverses this picture. Zerubbabel is Yahweh's obedient servant and, as a result of this faithfulness, Yahweh responds to him in a way which stands in contrast to his response to Jehoiachin.⁶⁸ Thus the metaphor of the taking off and the putting on of the signet function in both Haggai and Jeremiah as *an image of Yahweh's favor withdrawn or bestowed, and the manifestation of that favor in the experience of the individual addressed*. Haggai 2:23 thus provides a further comment on Jer 22:24–27 and juxtaposes Zerubbabel's faithfulness to Jehoiachin's lack thereof. What is lacking, however, in the text of Haggai (as opposed to the explicit descriptions of Jehoiachin's misfortunes) is any indication of the precise nature of the *correspondingly positive future experience* of Zerubbabel.

65. Gen 41:42 and Esth 8:2 are interesting parallels here in their use of קָטַף with reference to a ruler's placement of his signet (טַבַּעַת not חַתְמוֹת as in Hag 2:23) upon the hand of a delegate as an act of investiture.

66. Georg Sauer, "Serubbabel in der Sicht Haggais und Sacharjas," in *Das ferne und nahe Wort. Festschrift Leonhard Rost* (ed. F. Mass; BZAW 105; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1967), 199–207 (204). Cf. the debate between Carroll and Goldman, noted *supra*, regarding the implications of this text vis-à-vis Zerubbabel.

67. On the structure of Jer 21:1–24:10 and the redactional theme of the responsibility of the royal house for the nation's fall, cf. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 404.

68. Amsler, *Aggée-Zacharie*, 39, comments: "Clearly Haggai takes up the imagery found in Jeremiah and transforms it into a promise."

Various suggestions have been made regarding the specific form this manifestation of Yahweh's favour would take. A frequent affirmation regarding the implication of Haggai's words is that upon Yahweh's eschatological intervention, Zerubbabel would rule as a king in a reconstituted nation (Mason; Japhet; Petersen; Meyers and Meyers).⁶⁹ A related, although separate question is whether or not Haggai's words are intended to be a "messianic" designation. T. Chary⁷⁰ found no difficulty in affirming such a proposition, while R. Siebeneck and A. van Hoonacker,⁷¹ with many recent commentators would deny it. Similar notions are implicit in the view that Zerubbabel was to become Yahweh's vice-regent (Amsler; Beyse; Verhoef).⁷² In connection with such a designation, it has been argued that Hag 2:23 utilizes the form of an appointment or designation, drawn from court traditions (Wolff),⁷³ and that 2:22 resonates with motifs drawn from Pss 2 and 110 and thus has political overtones (Petersen).⁷⁴ In a variation on this approach, Lemaire views the anticipated change as far more modest in nature, and suggests that Haggai is expressing the hope of a change in the status of the province of Yehud, and of Zerubbabel's emergence as king of a vassal state within the Persian Empire.⁷⁵ In quite a different line of argumentation, some scholars see the royal and messianic themes here as faint or absent. Wolff suggests that the oracle merely guarantees that Zerubbabel will complete his task.⁷⁶ Rose argues that the language of 2:23, which may in other instances have royal

69. Rex A. Mason, *The Books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi* (CBC; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 25; Sara Japhet, "Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel: Against the Background of the Historical and Religious Tendencies of Ezra-Nehemiah," *ZAW* 94 (1982): 66-98 (77-78); Petersen (*Haggai*, 104) sees the verse as highlighting the "royal prerogatives" of Zerubbabel. Petersen seems to be somewhat imprecise in his evaluation of Zerubbabel's future status. On p. 104 he states that the sense of Haggai's words is, "I designate you as my earthly representative, equivalent in significance," then goes on to state that "Haggai . . . addressed the Davidide Zerubbabel as if he were to have royal status at some future time." The first statement goes far beyond the second. Meyers and Meyers speak of Zerubbabel at the head of an "independent Davidic state" as an "eschatological ruler" (*Haggai*, 69-70).

70. Chary, *Les prophètes et le culte*, 134.

71. Robert T. Siebeneck, "The Messianism of Aggeus and Proto-Zacharias," *CBQ* 19 (1951): 312-28; Albin van Hoonacker, *Les douze petits prophètes: traduits et commentés* (EB; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1908), 526.

72. Amsler (*Aggée-Zacharie*, 40) and Beyse (*Serubbabel und die Königserwartungen*, 56-57, with bibliography) call Zerubbabel the "vizier" of Yahweh over the world. In this they follow Ernst Sellin, *Das Zwölfprophetenbuch* (KAT 12/2; Leipzig: Deichert, 1922), 416. Verhoef (*Haggai*, 147-49) takes a similar view. See Rose, *Zemah*, 230-33, for an excellent survey (with bibliography) of the variations on this theme.

73. Wolff, *Haggai*, 99.

74. Petersen, *Haggai*, 100.

75. Lemaire, "Zorobabel et la Judée," 55-56; idem, "L'exploitation des sources uest-sémittiques," 308. As noted in the discussion of the status of Yehud (*supra*) such vassal-kingdoms did exist, and the Persians frequently followed a "dynastic model" in appointing their leadership. I personally find it hard to see why so modest a change would be couched in the grandiose language of cosmic portents, and the destruction of gentile power found in Hag 2:22.

76. Wolff, *Haggai*, 106.

overtone, is proclaimed to reassure Zerubbabel that he will be protected in the coming world upheaval.⁷⁷

In contrast to such attempts to determine the precise contours of Yahweh's exaltation of Zerubbabel, I would argue that the text's language deliberately blurs the future referent and makes it impossible to delineate it in any detail. As we have seen regarding Hag 2:6–9 and 20–23, the use of highly evocative language in a generalized fashion, with the result that a precise referent is difficult to ascertain, corresponds to the way religious traditions are handled elsewhere in Haggai. Various exegetes have remarked on the vagueness of Haggai's words. Japhet thus suggests that Haggai only "hints" at Zerubbabel's future role.⁷⁸ For Lagrange it is deliberately veiled.⁷⁹ I would propose that the most probable explanation of this phenomenon is that, as was the case in 2:6–9, the prophet (or the book's redactor[s]) sought to blur and homogenize those aspects of the tradition that were secondary to the rhetorical point under consideration, so that the latter might stand in stark relief.

This being the case, the rhetorical configuration of the text defies any attempt to elicit from it specific details of Yehud's future status and Zerubbabel's future role. In 2:1–9 the description of the temple's future glory functions, rhetorically speaking, as the basis for the call for the community to labor in the present.⁸⁰ In a similar way, the assurance that Zerubbabel, and by extension Yehud, will ultimately be greatly exalted is meant to function rhetorically as a call to accept the then-present realities of a small Persian province, presided over by a governor who was appointed by and subject to the imperial crown.⁸¹ Thus, Wolff is entirely correct in affirming that in Hag 2:21–23 Zerubbabel functions as a *persönlichen Hoffnungsträger*, a person whose presence constituted a tangible sign of hope.⁸² Thus the presence of a Davidic governor as political head of the province of Yehud served to attest that Yahweh's promises to the nation and to its royal house were not defunct. The province and its governor, provisional counterparts of the earlier king and nation, were evidence of Yahweh's real presence with his people and of his faithfulness to his promises, even in the midst of the depressing conditions of the early Achaemenid Period. The future,

77. Rose, *Zemah*, 241–43.

78. Japhet, "Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel," 78.

79. M.-J. Lagrange, "Notes sur les prophéties messianiques des derniers prophètes," *RB* 3 (1906): 67–83 (69), cited in Rose, *Zemah*, 234 n. 54.

80. Note that 2:6–9 are introduced by the particle ׀ functioning causally.

81. Kessler, "Second Year of Darius," 63–84; cf. independently, Bedford, *Temple Restoration*, 260. Bedford's statement of this motif in Haggai–Zech 1–8 is highly insightful and well formulated. Closely related to this idea is Bedford's assertion (using the language of A. F. C. Wallace) that for Haggai and Zechariah the rebuilding of the temple constituted an intermediate step or "transfer culture" which serves as a transitional stage between the existing culture and the goal culture.

82. Wolff, *Haggai*, German edition, 86. The English translation (p. 108) renders the term as "personal bearer of hope" which could be taken to mean "one who has hope." However, I take Wolff to mean "one whose presence is a tangible embodiment of hope, due to the divine promises made to him." Thus, in a sense, Zerubbabel functions as a "sign" of Yahweh's faithfulness. Similarly Deissler (*Petits prophètes*, 2:499) calls him a "type" or "substitute."

however, held great hope and promise. Yet, true to form, the book of Haggai is highly circumspect on the precise shape that future would take. For Haggai, specific details regarding the future could be left for a later time. Just as the specific means through which the temple would ultimately be glorified are deliberately obfuscated, so here the status of Zerubbabel and Yehud are expressed cryptically and laconically.

6. Conclusion

In summary, the oracle to Zerubbabel, read within the socio-political context of Early Persian Yehud, affirms the following:

- (1) The present state of affairs is acceptable in the eyes of Yahweh and receives his approbation. Zerubbabel, though a subaltern governor of a petty province within the empire, is Yahweh's servant and worthy of respect and honor. The community can continue in its worship at the temple, under the leadership of its priesthood and Davidic leader. Ongoing submission to foreign rule—certainly a state of affairs unforeseen in Israelite traditions of the monarchical period—was perhaps viewed by some as incompatible with submission to Yahweh. Yet Haggai affirms that such submission is no obstacle to faith and piety.
- (2) The promise to the House of David is not defunct. The rejection of Jehoiachin, as symbolized by Yahweh's jettisoning of his signet, did not signify the end of the role of the Davidic line. As Jehoiachin had been faithless, so Zerubbabel had been faithful. The promise to David was not at an end. However, it was now functioning in a new form, accommodated to the realities of the Persian period. Zerubbabel was not the ruler of a nation, but governor of a province. Yet, such a provisional situation posed no inherent threat to the promise to the Davidic house.
- (3) Despite the seemingly disappointing and humble state of Yehud's political fortunes within the Empire, Yahweh had greater things in store. The temple and governor, and by extension the people and nation, would experience exaltation through Yahweh's activity on their behalf. Such exaltation would occur in conjunction with the coming decisive intervention of Yahweh.
- (4) However, fourth and finally, the precise form of Zerubbabel's exaltation is deliberately veiled. Any attempts to determine it from the prophet's words runs counter to the rhetorical shape of the oracle itself. The salient point for the community was not the specific contours of Zerubbabel's future exaltation, nor for that matter the future status of the nation, or even of the temple. Rather the words of Haggai were meant to reassure a timorous and potentially despairing community that despite its present state of relative abasement, its life and worship, including its temple and governor, were acceptable before Yahweh. What is more, the community could live in the hope and expectation that present disappointment would turn into future rejoicing through the gracious intervention of Yahweh.

Just as the details of how the temple would be glorified in the future are deliberately obfuscated, so here the status of Zerubbabel and Yehud are expressed cryptically, yet in such a tantalizing way that ongoing speculation inevitably results. Indeed, the current debate, which the present study has sought to address, is evidence of the success of the evocative yet elusive language of our prophet.