# Subversion of Cyrus’ Claims of Legitimacy in Isaiah 41: 1-4 and in 45:1-7

Scholars have long posited that many of the motifs in Isaiah 40-66 (in particular in 40-48) interact directly with those found in the inscriptions of Cyrus and Neo-Babylonian kings.[[1]](#footnote-1) This position was summarized by Vanderhooft, who argued that “the prophet’s language was directly influenced by Mesopotamian royal inscriptions.” Vanderhooft also noted “that the concentration throughout the Second Isaiah is on the Babylonian milieu, ideas, and practices” (Vanderhooft 1999:170-171). Paul’s commentary on Isaiah 40-66 (2012) is a mother-lode of references in Isaiah 40-66 to Mesopotamian texts, with particular emphasis on the genre of royal inscriptions.

However, the position that Isaiah 40-66 draw on specific Mesopotamian sources no longer lies at the consensus of scholarship, due primarily to questions and doubts raised by Barstad and by Tiemeyer.[[2]](#footnote-2) The time is ripe to re-appraise the influence of the views of Barstad and Tiemeyer, in light of clearer statements of the appropriate methodology for comparative study that have emerged in recent years, and in light of sharp increases in our knowledge of how integrated the Judahites in Babylonia were into cuneiform culture.

This article will first briefly summarize what we know about the high degree of integration of Judahites in Babylonia, arguing (pace Tiemeyer) that many Judahites certainly would have been familiar with central motifs known to us from Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions. These “integrated” Judahites would have understood the intended references we find in some passages in Isaiah 40-48 to the royal ideology of sixth-century Babylonia. We then examine methodological statements of demonstrating borrowing from extra-Biblical sources to Biblical ones, and use these to explore parallels between motifs in Isa. 41:1-4 and in 45:1-7 and the royal inscriptions. We show that these could not reasonably have been composed without direct knowledge of Cyrus’ claims of empire, which we know his famous cylinder. Finally, we explore the implications of a Babylonian setting for these passages on the composition of Isaiah 40-66.

## Judahites in Babylonia: An Integrated Minority

Tiemeyer raised two objections to the position that parts of Isaiah 40-66 contain motifs we know from neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions. First, she argued that the relevant passages do not betray direct Babylonian influence and that any indirect influence is best explained as part of an amorphous “shared cultural heritage.”[[3]](#footnote-3) That objection will be addressed later in this essay; in discussing specific motifs in Isa. 41:1-4 and 45:1-7, I show that these passages could not have been composed without the influence of motifs we know from Cyrus’ inscriptions. Her argument that some of these motifs have different referents in the Mesopotamian texts than in Isaiah will also be addressed by discussing the mechanics of subversive references in later texts to earlier texts.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Tiemeyer’s second objection is based on the state of scholarly knowledge of the Babylonian Jewish community in 2010, and can no longer be sustained. Based on Zadok’s 1976 study, she argued that the Jews of Babylonia served as minor functionaries or as owners of small and middle-sized properties. The inference is that since they did not rise “to the highest classes of society,” they were unaware of Babylonian royal ideology or of the ways in which it was expressed. She further argued, based on Oded’s 2000 summary, were mainly settled in the agricultural periphery and only later began moving around. Although she briefly surveys Pearce’s 2006 discussion of the Al-Yahudu texts, Tiemeyer concludes that the texts depict an “exilic community at the lower levels of Babylonian society.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

In the last 20 years, a spate of publications based on the Al-Yahudu and other texts have shown that Judahites in Babylonia, as early as the second half of the sixth century BCE, were upwardly mobile, and were consequently in contact with written cuneiform culture. These show an exiled Judahite community negotiating boundaries which promoted group identity, while simultaneously involving itself in the economic life of Babylon.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Berlejung 2018 described a small group of elite Judahites in the Babylonian urban centres, a group which included the family of Jehoiachin.[[7]](#footnote-7) These elites in the urban centers were necessarily in contact with Babylonian literary culture. We also find a larger group of rural Judahites, many of whom received bow-fief lands in the countryside and also fulfilled compulsory service for the king. The rural Judahites were organized, as were many other middle-class Babylonians, into *ḫadru* units. By means of such groupings, rural Judahites interfaced with the Babylonian administration. Furthermore, by the second half of the sixth century BCE, some second-generation rural Judahites began to “climb the social ladder” (Berlejung’s term), advancing economically and developing greater ties with the Babylonian royal administration, with the scribal elite who were needed for contracts, and with the judicial system needed to adjudicate any contract disputes. While the masses of rural Judahites had little contact with the urban centers, there were clearly some rural Judahites who, by dint of their economic advancement, needed contact with these centers to preserve their newfound economic status. Royal merchants, tax collectors, and other officials were already found among Judahite exiles by the middle of the sixth century BCE.[[8]](#footnote-8)

All these economic roles created the context in which Judahites might learn the literary motifs and political ideas that were part of Babylonian urban culture. By no means do I claim that large numbers of rural Judahites were extensively familiar with Babylonian political ideology. But there were both a small urban elite and a gradually-increasing number of rural social climbers among Judahites in Babylon, and some of these (rural, urban, or both) certainly learned about Babylonian political and religious ideas.

Some of this transfer of knowledge is evident in Ezekiel. Babylonian literature such as Erra and Gilgamesh was clearly known to the author of passages in Ezekiel, as were many aspects of Babylonian temple architecture.[[9]](#footnote-9) Ezekiel is clearly aware of Babylonian commentary literature and of mathematical notations used in cuneiform texts, and of many other aspects of Babylonian literary culture.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Given what the author of Ezekiel knew about Babylonian contemporary elite culture, it seems an act of faith to assume that other members of the intellectual or economic elite of the Judahite community in Babylon knew nothing of Babylonian political machinations, and about the political ideology advanced by the claimants to the throne. They certainly would have known of the claims communicated by these leaders (or would-be leaders) to the Babylonian urban elite. They certainly heard such ideology in Aramaic. Although nearly all the texts we have at our disposal from Babylonia are in cuneiform, there was certainly a very active scribal culture in Aramaic, much of whose production has not survived the ravages of time.[[11]](#footnote-11) For our purposes, it matters little to us whether Judahite exiles in Babylonia knew Neo-Babylonian political ideology in Akkadian or Aramaic. They became aware of the terms in which these political claims were couched; they knew the claims, and the expressions used to convey them. Thus, a clear channel of transmission of Babylonian political ideas to Judahite exiles existed, addressing many of the doubts raised by Tiemeyer (2011:84-94).

The political claims which interest us here are those surrounding Cyrus’ attempts to claim legitimacy in the wake of his 539 BCE conquest of Babylon. Despite his patently non-Babylonian origins, Cyrus sought to portray himself as the divinely-chosen occupant of the throne of Babylon, leveraging his foreign origins to his advantage. We know of this self-portrayal, and of how it was disseminated, from the Cyrus cylinder, intended to help Cyrus obtain legitimacy among the Babylonian urban elite.[[12]](#footnote-12) Undoubtedly, arguments similar to those in the cylinder were circulated orally (and perhaps in Aramaic texts and/or in art) as part of an effective campaign for legitimacy. Much of the battle for legitimacy focused on the struggle between Cyrus and his predecessor Nabonidus, a ruler of Babylonian stock whom Cyrus sought to portray as an interloper. Waerzggers summarized Cyrus’ claims of legitimacy as follows: “Marduk summoned Cyrus from abroad to dispel the incompetent indigenous king, Nabonidus, and set things straight.”[[13]](#footnote-13) Aware that his foreign origins might render him suspect in the eyes of the city-elites of Babylonia, Cyrus sought to portray himself “not as a foreign and barbarian invader but as a restorer of what was right.”[[14]](#footnote-14) Cyrus’ “restoration” included first and foremost restoring privileges of the old established city elites of Babylon, and those of the temples venerating Marduk in Babylon.[[15]](#footnote-15) So Cyrus was well-positioned to claim to be the restorer of Babylon, regardless of his ethnic origins.

## Identifying References to Neo-Babylonian Political Claims in Isaiah 40-48

Some Judahites in Babylon would certainly have known of the attempts by Cyrus to legitimate his position and of the political claims he made. That group forms a key part of the audience of Isaiah 40-48.[[16]](#footnote-16) The author of these passages certainly supports the rise of Cyrus to the kingship of Babylon, and encourages his listeners to do likewise. On the other hand, he utterly rejects Cyrus’ attribution of his rise to the intervention of the gods of Babylon, with Marduk chief among them. His need to support Cyrus, while rejecting Cyrus’ explanation for his rise encourages him to develop an alternative explanation for Cyrus’ rise. He does this by referencing Cyrus’ claims of empire while simultaneously subverting them, in a manner similar to the subversion of Assyrian claims of empire in Isaiah 1-39.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Identifying such subversive references, however, requires methodological rigour: it is clearly insufficient to simply adduce similarities between motifs in a Mesopotamian text and a Biblical one. Drawing on Hutcheon, Crouch has argued that intentional references to Mesopotamian texts in Biblical ones can be demonstrated only when the Biblical text overtly signals its references to the older work in such a way as to make the reference clearly perceptible to the intended audience. Furthermore, she notes that “The more complex the relationship between the source and other potential sources, and the more specific the author intends to be in identifying the source, the more specific the signal needs to be…”[[18]](#footnote-18)

This method of identifying sources draws on the earlier study by Hays, who noted three criteria critical for our purposes:

1. the precision of the similarity
2. the recurrence or clustering of references to the extra-biblical text in the Biblical one
3. the contribution of the intertextual reading to the larger rhetorical unit’s argument.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Clearly, precision of the similarity is critical in enabling the intended audience to recognize, in the words of the Biblical author, a reference to a Mesopotamian motif. However, it is important to recognize that subversion differs from simple adaptation. In subversive references, the author of the subversive text intentionally changes aspects of the borrowed motif in order to undermine some of its key claims. In her discussion of the nature of subversion, Crouch notes that “the source text is at once denigrated, by virtue of being the target of the subversive efforts, yet also perversely honored,” by being deemed worthy of reference.[[20]](#footnote-20) This denigration takes the form of highlighting key weaknesses of the argument in the borrowed text, often by re-assigning borrowed elements to other actors in the text. Nevertheless, despite such changes, “a compelling case for intentional allusion must rely heavily on the distinctiveness and volume of the proposed parallels.”[[21]](#footnote-21)

Several of these methodological points respond to two arguments Tiemeyer presents in arguing against attempts at identifying allusion to Mesopotamian motifs in Isaiah 40-66. First, she argued that “most texts in the Hebrew Bible betray Akkadian influence,” and that there is no specific referencing of Mesopotamian motifs in Isaiah 40-66.[[22]](#footnote-22) The key points which demonstrate that the passages discussed below do intentionally subvert these motifs were noted by Hays: precision, clustering, and especially the role of the subverted motif in the overall argument in the Biblical text. Furthermore, with specific reference to Isa. 45:1 and the Cyrus Cylinder, she argued that “the subject and the object differ in the two texts,” i.e. actions which are assigned in Cylinder to Marduk are assigned to others in the Biblical text.[[23]](#footnote-23) But as Crouch noted, a key element in subversion is this type of denigration. Here, that denigration is accomplished through transference of the borrowed element to a different actor. The key question in identifying subversion remains: would the subverted element be recognized by the audience? Or, to use Tigay’s question in addressing literary borrowing: could the borrowed element reasonably have been composed without reference to the Mesopotamian text?[[24]](#footnote-24)

Two passages from Isaiah 40-48 clearly demonstrate precision, clustering, subversive references, and a sophisticated use of these subverted motifs in both honouring and denigrating the arguments of the Cyrus cylinder: Isa. 41:1-4 and 45:1-7. In both, the specific motifs are used to construct the reference and direct the audience’s memory towards the types of motifs we know from the cylinder, but the overall argument provides an alternative explanation for the question raised by the cylinder: Who sent Cyrus? I do not claim that the author of these passages necessarily read the cylinder as we have it today, but that s/he was familiar with the claims we know from the cylinder, which were circulated in Babylon through various media. The cylinder is important only because it is one of our primary extant witnesses to these claims.

## Isa 41:1-4

We begin with Isaiah 41:1-4, one of the first passages in Isaiah 40-66 to directly engage Cyrus’ claims of legitimacy. It is formulated as a “rib” passage, in which God calls nations to judgment.

 הַֽחֲרִ֤ישׁוּ אֵלַי֙ אִיִּ֔ים וּלְאֻמִּ֖ים יַֽחֲלִ֣יפוּ כֹ֑חַ יִגְּשׁוּ֙ אָ֣ז יְדַבֵּ֔רוּ יַחְדָּ֖ו לַמִּשְׁפָּ֥ט נִקְרָֽבָה׃ **ב** מִ֤י הֵעִיר֙ מִמִּזְרָ֔ח צֶ֖דֶק יִקְרָאֵ֣הוּ לְרַגְל֑וֹ יִתֵּ֨ן לְפָנָ֤יו גּוֹיִם֙ וּמְלָכִ֣ים יַ֔רְדְּ יִתֵּ֤ן כֶּֽעָפָר֙ חַרְבּ֔וֹ כְּקַ֥שׁ נִדָּ֖ף קַשְׁתּֽוֹ׃ **ג** יִרְדְּפֵ֖ם יַֽעֲב֣וֹר שָׁל֑וֹם אֹ֥רַח בְּרַגְלָ֖יו לֹ֥א יָבֽוֹא׃ **ד** מִֽי־פָעַ֣ל וְעָשָׂ֔ה קֹרֵ֥א הַדֹּר֖וֹת מֵרֹ֑אשׁ אֲנִ֤י יְהוָה֙ רִאשׁ֔וֹן וְאֶת־אַֽחֲרֹנִ֖ים אֲנִי־הֽוּא׃ **ה** רָא֤וּ אִיִּים֙ וְיִרָ֔אוּ קְצ֥וֹת הָאָ֖רֶץ יֶֽחֱרָ֑דוּ קָֽרְב֖וּ וַיֶּֽאֱתָיֽוּן׃

1. Be silent before Me, isles, and let the peoples renew their strength. Let them approach and then speak, opposite each other we will approach for trial.
2. Who awakened (someone) from the east, and called victory/justice to his feet? He gave before him nations, and over kings he will rule.

He makes his sword (as numerous as) dust, his bow like the flying chaff

1. He chases them, and passes peacefully, over a road that did not yet come to his feet.
2. Who accomplished and did this? He who announces the generations from the first. I am the Lord, first, and I am with the most recent ones.
3. The isles see and fear, the edges of the earth tremble, they approach and come.[[25]](#footnote-25)

The court case pursued in these verses addresses the question: “Who awakened someone from the east” and then “called victory to his feet?” This question, of course, is the substance of Cyrus’ claims of legitimacy as king of Babylon. In the Cyrus cylinder, the central argument Cyrus advances in favour of his legitimacy is that Marduk chose him. Isaiah 41:1-4 asks the same question, but comes up with a different answer: YHWH chose Cyrus. Thus, the rhetoric of Isaiah 41:1-4 addresses the same larger question as do Cyrus'’claims of legitimacy.

In order to clearly reference the legitimation claim we know from the Cyrus cylinder (and which was certainly conveyed to the people of Babylon in other ways), the author of Isa. 41:1-4 interpolates three motifs we know from the cylinder. Thus, not only does the rhetoric revolve around the same larger question, but the motifs used to express this also intentionally reference Cyrus’ claims:

The first point is the vast numbers of armies possessed by the one awakened from the east. Isa. 41:3 describes how YHWH makes “his sword (as numerous) as dust, his arrows like flying chaff.” Similarly, the Cyrus cylinder describes Cyrus’ progress towards Babylon as follows:

16 *ummānišu rapšāti ša kima mê nāri lā ūtaddu nībašun, kakkēšunu șanduma išaddiha idāšu*

16. His extensive army, which like the water of the river cannot be counted, weapons harnessed, processed at his side (lit., at his hand)[[26]](#footnote-26)

Of course, descriptions of extensive armies are hardly unique to these two texts. But as Hays noted, the clustering of references to the extra-biblical text in the Biblical one provides a methodologically strong grounding for establishing an intentional reference or borrowing.

The second point is the attaining of victory over enemies without any battle. In Isa. 41:2: “He gives before him nations, and over kings he will rule,” and in 41:3a: “He chases them (i.e., the enemies) and passes them peacefully.”[[27]](#footnote-27) Cyrus’ cylinder describes the victories Cyrus achieved, and in line 17 specifically addresses the lack of any battle in entering Babylon:

17 *balu qabli u tahazi ušēribaš qereb* šu.an.na ki *ālišu*

17. With no fight or battle, he caused him to enter Babylon, his city.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Like the first point, the victory over a city without battle is a common motif in the ancient Near East, but the concatenation of the two motifs, together with the larger question of which god/God is responsible for guiding the ruler, creates the basis for demonstrating borrowing.

The third point is more unique and is found rarely in other texts, but appears in both Isa. 41:3b and in Cyrus’ experiences in his victory over Babylon. The Biblical verse describes how YHWH causes Cyrus to pass through “a road that did not yet come to his feet.” (A detailed linguistic discussion justifying the translation appears below, after a discussion of v. 3a.) This description corresponds to Cyrus’ experience as an outsider entering Babylon, an experience he vaunts in the cylinder when he portrays himself as someone sent to rescue Babylon, to which Marduk ordered him to march (line 15). [[29]](#footnote-29) The depiction of the “one from the east” being sent on a road on which he has previously not traveled is common to both texts, and is unique to both.

The motifs noted are common to both texts in concept, but the Biblical motifs do not appear to be couched in language which bears the imprint of Akkadian diction. It appears that the Biblical author knew of these claims by the medium of Aramaic, and did not necessarily have direct access to the Cyrus cylinder (or did not think it relevant to betray such knowledge). But Isa. 41:3a nevertheless contains one expression bearing the influence of Akkadian, which is unknown in Aramaic. This seems to be an example of what Rendsburg called “style-switching,” in which the Biblical author takes certain phrases from a foreign language, and uses them to identify the speaker as a member of that foreign group.[[30]](#footnote-30) The intent of using this phrase is not to call to mind a specific phrase in the Cyrus’ cylinder, but to indicate affinity between the claim in these verses and the Akkadian-language arguments disseminated by Cyrus.

The phrase is יעבר שלום in Isa. 41:3a. This combination has no parallels in Biblical Hebrew, and is grammatically difficult, with the word שלום being used adverbially without any obvious sign in the grammar of the verse. As Paul argued, this phrase is based on the Akkadian *šalmiš etēqu***,** an expression meaning “to pass in peace” which is used quite frequently in Akkadian, and also appears in the standard language of Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions, to describe how kings won victories over enemies.[[31]](#footnote-31) While the phrase does not appear in the Cyrus cylinder specifically, it is a standard element in royal inscription in which kings vaunt themselves, and it would appear that the author of Isa. 41:3a uses this phrase in order to accomplish “style-switching,” referencing Akkadian diction, and more specifically, a phrase commonly used in royal inscriptions.

We now return to the second half of 41:3, where the phrase אֹ֥רַח בְּרַגְלָ֖יו לֹ֥א יָבֽוֹא appears. Above, we briefly discussed its imagery, but its language also requires comment, and will allow us to identify in these words a “blind motif.” This phrase has given interpreters pause over the centuries. R. David Qimhi’s suggestion “a bad road will not come under his feet” points to the difficulty: why should a road not come under his feet? To solve the problem, Radaq interpolates the adjective “bad.” To solve the same problem, Paul uses Aramaic parallels to re-interpret ארח as “fetter,” a meaning otherwise unattested in Hebrew.[[32]](#footnote-32) But ארח is well-attested in Biblical Hebrew with the meaning of path, and positing an otherwise-unattested meaning is methodologically problematic.[[33]](#footnote-33)

The simplest and most methodologically-appropriate way of interpreting the phrase is to accept the standard meaning of ארח as path, and interpreting the phrase as an asyndetic relative clause, as Rashi does. Rashi interprets “a path on which his feet do not walk,” or “on which his feet are not used to walking,” interpreting יבוא as a permansive.[[34]](#footnote-34) Interpolating the meaning of a relative pronoun is a fairly standard grammatical feature; interpolating an adjective such as “bad” has no basis in standard philology. Therefore, the phrase describes someone walking on a road on which he had not previously walked. Such a description seems to be a classic “blind motif,” i.e., a motif which only makes sense when one recognizes that it derives from an earlier source.[[35]](#footnote-35)

The phrase does make sense if we understand the phrase to refer to what Cyrus claims was his experience in conquering Babylon. As part of the description of Cyrus in 41:2b-3, the phrase describes Cyrus as walking on a road on which he had never walked before. This fits well with his march to Babylon, in which he marched on a road which he had previously not taken.[[36]](#footnote-36) As noted above, part of his self-presentation was leveraging his status as an outsider who had never been part of the Babylonian milieu before he was chosen by Marduk to replace Nabonaid.[[37]](#footnote-37) Thus, Cyrus is described as passing his enemies, having marched on a road on which he previously never marched.

Thus, we have in Isa. 41:1-4 three distinct motifs that parallel motifs we know from Cyrus’ cylinder and/or to the experiences he emphasizes in this cylinder. Two of these are not unique, but one of them is a “blind motif,” which only makes sense if one posits a reference to Cyrus. Furthermore, we find here a Hebrew phrase (יעבר שלום) which clearly draws on a phrase we know from Mesopotamian royal inscriptions. Taken together, these intentional references fit the criteria noted by both Couch and Hays. We have a clustering of references to an extra-biblical “text” in the Biblical one. (Here, the extra-biblical “text” are the series of arguments made by Cyrus to bolster his legitimacy, arguments we know from the Cyrus cylinder.) But more importantly, we have here references that contribute to the the larger rhetorical unit’s argument. The question of “Who awakened victory from the east?” cannot be understood or answered without reference to the type of arguments found in Cyrus’ cylinder.

Machinist further contextualized these arguments by connecting them to the larger intellectual ferment within the Babylonian religious sphere in the reign of Nabonidus, which I noted briefly above. Cyrus clearly leveraged the discontent with Nabonidus’ reforms to advance his own political position. Machinist posits that the author of this and other trial speeches was aware of this intellectual ferment.[[38]](#footnote-38) In response, Tiemeyer argued that “Machinist’s arguments only function within the context of the consensus of a Babylonian setting of Isa 40-55…Machinist accepts the view that Isa 40-55 was composed in Babylon and on that basis does his exegesis.”[[39]](#footnote-39) The “consensus” of a Babylonian setting for this and many other passages in Isa. 40-48 is not assumed but rather has a strong methodological basis. In the foregoing, I have shown the clear methodological basis for this view with regard to Isa. 41:1-4.

We can therefore proceed to understand this passage as a rhetorical response to Cyrus’ claims of legitimacy. The passage concludes with the rhetorical question מי פעל ועשה in v. 4, which echoes the question with which the passage began in v. 1. Paul notes the continuity with the message of the previous verse: “Who was it that planned and executed Cyrus’ triumphant arrival?”[[40]](#footnote-40) But the particular description of YHWH in this verse interacts directly with, and subverts, aspects of different Babylonian theologies.

Without specifically referring to Isa. 41:4, Machinist noted that many passages in Isa. 40-55 attack the theology Nabonidus promulgated, according to which “only Sin of all deities could act to bring about an event without precedent in Mesopotamian history.”[[41]](#footnote-41) But in 41:4, we find a direct subversion, not of Sin theology, but of Marduk theology. In arguing that YHWH is “He who announces the generations from the first,” as well as emphasizing that YHWH is both “first” ראשון, and “with the most recent ones,” ואת אחרונים אני הוא (lit., “I, even, I am with the last”). The emphasis on YHWH as “first” hits at the Achilles heel of Marduk theology. As a “younger god”, Marduk was not there at the point of creation, and cannot claim to have been the creator-god.[[42]](#footnote-42) But God can, this is the thrust of the prophet’s subversive attack on Marduk. To prove that YHWH, not Marduk, sent Cyrus, the prophet highlights how YHWH is more likely to be able to bring about unprecedented events than Marduk. The god who created the world and implanted its “operating system” can also direct future events. Marduk cannot claim to have been “first” or “creator”; YHWH can. YHWH therefore has an advantage that even the most loyal of Marduk’s adherents cannot claim for Marduk. Even Marduk-worshippers, therefore, are forced to admit that YHWH has a better claim to bring about unprecedented events.

As Weinfeld noted, much of the emphasis on God as creator in Isa. 40-48 is part of a sustained polemic against Marduk.[[43]](#footnote-43) As we see also in in 40: 12-27 and 42:5-9 and 45:11-13, the prophet argues that because He is the creator, God also knows and directs future events.

Although many other passages in Isaiah 40-48 also engage in polemics and subversion of ideologies and theologies promulgated by Cyrus, we move now to Isa. 45:1-7. Like 41:1-4, it clearly refers to Cyrus, and also mentions him by name. Like 41:1-4, scholars have long noted references in it to motifs Cyrus uses to legitimate himself. Neverthelesss, Tiemeyer argues against parallels used to show how this passage corresponds closely to Cyrus’ claims.[[44]](#footnote-44) Below, I re-examine these arguments, using the methodological criteria noted above.

## Isa 45:1-7

We find a clustering of four parallel motifs, in the Biblical passage and Cyrus’ cylinder. None are unique to these two texts, but their clustering together, as well as the role of these motifs in shaping the rhetoric of each passage, show that 45:1-6 could not reasonably have been composed without knowledge of Cyrus’ claims.[[45]](#footnote-45) As in 41:1-4, the paralles do not indicate direct borrowing from the text of Cyrus’ cylinder, but rather that the Cyrus’ cylinder is a written record of claims circulated in Babylon by Cyrus, to which the author of Isa. 40-48 reacts.

1. **א** כֹּֽה־אָמַ֣ר יְ-הוָה֮ לִמְשִׁיחוֹ֮ לְכ֣וֹרֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר־הֶֽחֱזַ֣קְתִּי בִֽימִינ֗וֹ לְרַד־לְפָנָיו֙ גּוֹיִ֔ם וּמָתְנֵ֥י מְלָכִ֖ים אֲפַתֵּ֑חַ לִפְתֹּ֤חַ לְפָנָיו֙ דְּלָתַ֔יִם וּשְׁעָרִ֖ים לֹ֥א יִסָּגֵֽרוּ׃ **ב** אֲנִי֙ לְפָנֶ֣יךָ אֵלֵ֔ךְ וַֽהֲדוּרִ֖ים אושר (אֲיַשֵּׁ֑ר) דַּלְת֤וֹת נְחוּשָׁה֙ אֲשַׁבֵּ֔ר וּבְרִיחֵ֥י בַרְזֶ֖ל אֲגַדֵּֽעַ׃ **ג** וְנָֽתַתִּ֤י לְךָ֙ אֽוֹצְר֣וֹת חֹ֔שֶׁךְ וּמַטְמֻנֵ֖י מִסְתָּרִ֑ים לְמַ֣עַן תֵּדַ֗ע כִּֽי־אֲנִ֧י יְ-הוָ֛ה הַקּוֹרֵ֥א בְשִׁמְךָ֖ אֱ-לֹהֵ֥י יִשְׂרָאֵֽל׃ **ד** לְמַ֨עַן֙ עַבְדִּ֣י יַֽעֲקֹ֔ב וְיִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל בְּחִירִ֑י וָֽאֶקְרָ֤א לְךָ֙ בִּשְׁמֶ֔ךָ אֲכַנְּךָ֖ וְלֹ֥א יְדַעְתָּֽנִי׃ **ה** אֲנִ֤י יְ-הוָה֙ וְאֵ֣ין ע֔וֹד זֽוּלָתִ֖י אֵ֣ין אֱלֹהִ֑ים אֲאַזֶּרְךָ֖ וְלֹ֥א יְדַעְתָּֽנִי׃ **ו** לְמַ֣עַן יֵֽדְע֗וּ מִמִּזְרַח־שֶׁ֨מֶשׁ֙ וּמִמַּ֣עֲרָבָ֔ה כִּי־אֶ֖פֶס בִּלְעָדָ֑י אֲנִ֥י יְ-הוָ֖ה וְאֵ֥ין עֽוֹד׃
2. Thus says the Lord to his anointed one, to Cyrus, whose right hand I held to subjugate before him nations, and ungird the loins of kings, to open before him doors so that gates will not be closed. (2) I shall go before him and straighten impressive scenery, I will smash doors of bronze and chop open bars of iron. (3) So that I may give you treasures of darkness and hidden hoards, so that you may know that I am YHWH who calls your name, the God of Israel. (4) For the sake of My servant Jacob and Israel My chosen one, I call you by name, I designate you though you know Me not. (5) I am YHWH and there is no other, there is no god other than Me, I gird you although you know Me not. (6) So that they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting that there is none but Me, I am the Lord and there is no one else.[[46]](#footnote-46)

Four different motifs are shared by the Cyrus cylinder and Isa. 45:1-6.

The first image is that of God holding Cyrus’ right hand. Of course, the expression החזיק ביד is a “well known idiomatic Hebrew expression and its Akkadian equivalent is equally commonly attested.”[[47]](#footnote-47) But its use to designate support for a king (or any other leader) is very rare in the Hebrew Bible.[[48]](#footnote-48) It first appears in II Ki 16:19, in reference to Menahem receiving support from Tiglath-pileser III (aka Pul) in return for payment, and is also used in Ezek. 30:25 to refer to God strengthening the king of Babylonia against Pharaoh. Other than these two occurrences, both of which are clearly aware of the details of Mesopotamian history (and may well be influenced by the Akkadian expression), all other references to this phrase with the meaning of strengthening a leader appear in Isa. 40-45: 41:13, 42:6, and our passage.

Therefore, the fact that the phrase להחזיק יד is common in Biblical Hebrew is less relevant. The only semantic similarities in the Hebrew Bible between this expression and its Akkadian cognates occur in contexts with clear Mesopotamian influence. This raises doubts about Tiemeyer’s assertion that “this is not a matter of influence.”[[49]](#footnote-49) In the Cyrus cylinder, we find two different expressions which are similar to Isa. 41:13, 42:6 and 45:1. The first appears in line 12, where Marduk is said to strengthen Cyrus as he marches to Babylon:

11 *kullat mātāta kališina ihīt ibrêma* 12 *ište’ēma malki išaru, bibil libbiša*

*ittamah qatušu l kuraš* lugal uru *anšan ittabi nibitsu ana malikūti kullata naphar izzakra šumašu*

All the lands, all of them, he watched over and kept an eye on, he searched for a straight king, the desire of his heart

He supported his hand, Cyrus, the king of the city of Anshan he called his call.

To the kingship over all of totality he mentioned his name.[[50]](#footnote-50)

A further similarity appears in line 15, where Marduk is said to walk at Cyrus’ side as a friend:

15 *ana ālišu* ká.dingirmeš ki *alakšu iqbi ušașbitsuma harranu* tin.tirki *kima ibri u tappê ittallaka idāšu*15 To his city Babylon, he commanded his walking. He caused him to seize the road to Babylon, like a friend and companion, he walked at his side (Akk. *idāšu* etymological cognate of Heb. *yado,* his hand).

The imagery is clearly similar, the only open question is whether a common expression can be used as a basis for establishing borrowing between the texts. As noted above, the expression החזיק ביד/בימין with the meaning of supporting a leader, is not very common in the Hebrew Bible, and is only used under Mesopotamian influence. And more importantly, the expression is part of a group of other similarities between Isa. 45:1-7 and the imagery of Marduk’s support for Cyrus in the cylinder. The clustering of similarities together provides a clear basis for adducing borrowing, as both Albright and Hays noted.[[51]](#footnote-51) We now move on to other similarities.

The second image appears in Isa. 41:1b-2, and refers to God causing enemies to be defeated before Cyrus: God promises “to subjugate before him nations,” and this expression is followed by several different images narrating how God will neutralize his opponents and allow subjugation without battle. These include ungirding the loins of kings and opening doors. This battle-less victory corresponds precisely to Cyrus’ self-portrayal in the cylinder.[[52]](#footnote-52) The two motifs cited so far (the support by means of the hand, and the battle-less victory), together with the larger question of the deity responsible, already create a strong basis for demonstrating borrowing. But there are further shared motifs.

The third image appears in Isa. 45:3: “so that you may know that I am YHWH who calls your name, the God of Israel.” Subsequently, 45:4 emphasizes that Cyrus does not recognize that God is calling his name. The expression “to call by name” is commonly used in Biblical Hebrew to refer to designating a person for a particular task, as in Exod. 31:2. As Tiemeyer notes, the expression itself does not provide evidence for Babylonian influence.[[53]](#footnote-53) Nevertheless, the concantenation of a deity holding a person’s hand and calling his name, as a way of supporting and designating him for rulership, appears only in these two texts. In line 12 of Cyrus’ cylinder and in Isa. 45:1-3, these two motifs are combined as a way of expressing that a god/God chose Cyrus for rulership. This unique combination can hardly be ignored or deemed accidental. It corresponds precisely to the type of complex motif, engaging disparate elements in a common pattern, that both Albright and Hays saw as classic examples of evidence of borrowing.

The case for intentional referencing of Cyrus’ claims in Isa. 45:1-7 rests on the clustering of these three motifs in both the Cyrus cylinder and in these few verses. Of course, each of the motifs appears in isolation elsewhere. But there is no other text where all three motifs cluster together, and the clustering itself is evidence of borrowing and referencing. It is very hard to posit that these motifs cluster together only in these two texts, due to accidents of history. The fact that both texts address the same central question is further evidence for the Biblical passage intentionally referencing Cyrus’ claims. The Biblical passage is wholly dedicated to asserting that YHWH sent Cyrus, while the cylinder’s main rhetorical goal is to argue that because Marduk sent Cyrus, Cyrus is legitimate.

As these examples make clear, the Biblical text does not simply adopt these motifs, but rather subverts them in a consistent manner, arguing that Cyrus is indeed sent, but not by Marduk. Based on this subversion, we can now approach a fourth common element in both texts, the motif of universal recognition. This motif is not useful in demonstrating borrowing, but it is useful in illustrating how subversion of motifs operates. Close to the end of the Cyrus cylinder, lines 28-32 describe how “all the kings of all the lands who sit on thrones, from the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea, who live in [far away] regions, the kings of the Amorite lands, who dwell in tents, they all brought their heavy tribute to me in the midst of Babylon, and kissed my feet.” The motif of universal recognition is ubiquitous in the Assyrian royal inscriptions, where kings claim the title “king of the four corners” if they rule from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean (the two seas to which Cyrus refers), and Cyrus’ formulation reflects that universal fixation.[[54]](#footnote-54) The motif of universal recognition also appears in Isaiah 45:1-7, but in a very different guise.

Verses 3-6 gradually describe how YHWH will achieve universal recognition for His appointment of Cyrus. Verse 3 highlights that YHWH calls Cyrus by name, but verses 4 and 5 emphasize that Cyrus does not recognize YHWH. Verse 6 then highlights the eventual change that will take place in the world. Eventually, at some future time, as a result of God’s appointment of Cyrus, all nations “from the rising of the sun to its setting” will recognize God’s universal rule. The use of the east-to-west motif to indicate universal acceptance of God’s rule is not uncommon in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Pss. 50:1, 113:3-4, and Mal. 1:11). But the appearance of this motif in the context of Cyrus’ recognition of YHWH seems to reference Cyrus’ own claims of being recognized as a universal sovereign.

The author of Isa. 45:1-7 is therefore playing a delicate game of approval and subversion. If we use Crouch’s terms, we might refer to a combination of honouring and denigration. On the one hand, Cyrus is approved of and recognized as a positive force in the world, sent by YHWH. Cyrus claims of legitimacy are endorsed, without endorsing the rationale he provides for those claims. In Isa. 40-48, Cyrus is legitimate, while the god he claims sent him is not. Marduk is attacked, but Cyrus is legitmated. Cyrus was indeed sent, but by YHWH and not by Marduk.

## Conclusion

The careful combination of denigration and honouring evident in Isa. 45:1-6 begs the question of the intended audience of such passages. Whom did the author of Isaiah 40-48 want to convince? It is obviously implausible for these passages to have been directed at Cyrus himself. But our discussion of the Judahite community in Babylon, above, raises important clues about the intended audience.

Judahites in Babylon who had integrated in some way into cuneiform culture knew of Cyrus’ claims, as discussed above. They were certainly aware of the changes in the political leadership in Babylon and of the claims advanced by Cyrus to legitimate his rule.

As Cyrus’ rule became an established fact, they would have accepted both his rule, and have been more intensely exposed to the claims he made for legitimating it. The very establishment of Cyrus’ rule lent credence to these claims. And it is here that the author of Isa. 40-48 steps into the breach, with his careful game of subversive acceptance of Cyrus.

He argues that the Judahites must on the one hand accept Cyrus, while simultaneously rejecting his theology. He argues for an acceptance of Cyrus’ programme of permitting construction of the Jerusalem temple, and enthusiastically endorses the return of Judahites to Judah implicit in this permission. But he combines these with a resolute rejection of the reasons Cyrus advances justifying his rule. There is no Marduk, argues the author of Isa. 45:6, there is only YHWH, and He has sent Cyrus.

The delicate literary portrayal we have explored here, in which motifs from Cyrus’ claims of legitimacy are used while subverting these claims in ways that denigrate Cyrus’ ideology, mirrors the delicate ideological stance the prophet advocates for his audience. He advises them to enthusiastically endorse Cyrus and his program of return (as in Isa. 45:1-4), while viewing him as something of a benighted benefactor who fails to identify his patron (as in Isa. 45:4-6). Cyrus is sent by God without recognizing God. Cyrus’ actions in returning Judahites to Judah should be accepted, while the whole of his rhetoric about his legitimacy should be rejected. Anyone who has ever tried to be an active member of any political party will recognize the intense difficulty of living such a bifurcated type of simultaneous acceptance and rejection.

This ideological and political program is relevant only in Babylonia. Yehud of the period of Cyrus was at best a political backwater. Questions such as the acceptance or rejection of Cyrus, and his ideological stance, would have been at most matters of abstract interest for the small population of this impoverished region in the late sixth century. The ideological program advocated in Isa. 41:1-4 and 45:1-6 would certainly have fallen on deaf (not to say bemused) ears in this region.

Only in Babylon itself would these questions have actively engaged an audience. And this active engagement would only have been relevant in the precise period after Cyrus’ rise to the throne; they would have had no relevance in later periods. The geographical and temporal setting of Isa. 41:1-4 and of 45:1-6 (and of much of Isa. 40-48) is extremely clear: these passages were addressed to the Judahites of Babylonia in the period immediately surrounding 538 BCE.

This does not necessarily mean that all of Isaiah 40-66 was composed in Babylon. As Paul noted, “from chap. 49 onward, the prophecies are set within Jerusalem, and reflect the situation of the nation after the return from Babylon.”[[55]](#footnote-55) As he notes, in chapters 49-66, “there is no mention of the exclusivelness and unity of the Deity, no polemic against idolatry and their worshippers, no mention of judicial proceedings against the nations, and no arguments for God’s omniscience and omnipotence as proven by His work in history and nature. Moreover, there is no reference to either Babylon or Cyrus as God’s agent in bringing about the deliverance of Israel.”[[56]](#footnote-56) In their place, we find encouragement to the community living through the intense difficulty of life in impoverished Yehud. We are forced, therefore, to accept the view of Barstad and Tiemeyer of a Palestinian setting as relevant only to Isaiah 49-66. The continuity in style of rhetoric can easily be explained by positing that the prophet took his own advice in Isa. 48:20 and went forth from Babylon.

1. Behr’s 1937 was one of the first studies to clearly note similarities between expressions in Isaiah 40-66 and those found in Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions. Since then, the topic has been addressed by Koch )1972(, Kratz (1991), and Fried (2002), each of whom discussed the specific mentions of Cyrus, engaging some of the Mesopotamian material. More detailed comparisons between individual verses and specific passages in Mesopotamian inscriptions were presented by Cohen (1968), Paul (1968), Eph’al (1989) and Schaudig (2008). The larger thematic parallels were explored by Machinist (2003). These studies demonstrate the rich potential for further and more comprehensive comparative study. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Barstad (1987; 1997) vigourously argued that the author of 40-55 never lived in Babylon (a view with which Baltzer [2001] concurs), and furthermore, that Palestine was not depopulated after the Babylonian exile. On the contrary, he argues, the compositions in Isa. 40-55 are directed at the community living in Palestine, exhorting them to see themselves as the continuation of the culture of “old Israel.” In support of this thesis, often known as the “myth of the empty land,” he argues that there are very few true Akkadian loan-words in Isaiah 40-55 and that many of the terms identified as Akkadian in fact come from Aramaic. But the key question is whether the motifs in the Biblical material can be shown to be dependent on Neo-Babylonian antecedents, not whether they were transmitted in Akkadian or Aramaic. As I discuss below, it is entirely possible that the motifs we know from the Akkadian-language neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions reached the author of passages in Isaiah by means of Aramaic. Tiemeyer (2011)’s arguments are discussed below. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The lack of direct influence is addressed at pp. 96-98 and the issue of “shared cultural heritage” at p. 130. Tiemeyer, Lena-Sofia, *For the Comfort of Zion: The Geographical and Theological Location of Isaiah 40-55,* VT Sup~~p~~. 139. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. She raises this point at pp. 88-92. For discussion of how the Isaiah corpus subverts and adapts motifs from Assyrian royal inscriptions, so that the referents are no longer identical, but the audience clearly understands the intended evoking of the motif we know from the royal inscriptions, see Aster 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Tiemeyer 2011:73-75. Refences are to R. Zadok, *The Jews in Babylonia in the Chaldean and Achaemenian Periods in Light of the Babylonian Sources* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1976); B. Oded, “The Settlements of the Israelite and Judean Exiles in Mesopotamia in the 8th-6th centuries BCE,” *Studies in Historical Geography and Biblical Historiography,* FS Zechraiah Kallai (eds. G. Galil and M. Wienfeld), VTS 81 (Leiden: Brill, 2000)< p.. 91-103; and Laurie E. Pearce, “Judeans in Babylon,” *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (eds. O. Lipschits and M. Oeming; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 20060, pp. 399-411. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. A small selection of recent studies include Abraham 2015; Alstola 2019; Beaulieu 2015; Bloch 2014; Berlejung 2016, 2017, and 2018; Pearce 2014; Stökl 2015; Wunsch 2013; Waerzeggers 2014; Zadok 2014 and 2015, and other essays in Stökl and Waerzeggers 2015b; Zilberg 2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The original publication of this tablet was Weidner 1939. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Rom-Shiloni 2017 and Berlejung 2018. Jursa 2010 and 2017 illustrate how the developing economy of southern Babylonia was the context in which this economic advancement took place; the economy developed due to a combination of private enterprise and imperial control. This nexus between the individual entrepreneur and the imperial economy certainly created fertile ground for contact between Judahites and imperial administrators. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. On Erra, see Daniel Bodi Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel and the Poem of Erra*. Orbis Biblicus

   et Orientalis 104. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991. ;on Gilgamesh, see Abraham Winitzer, ‘Assyriology and Jewish Studies in Tel Aviv: Ezekiel among the Babylonian literati’, in Encounters by the Rivers of Babylon: Scholarly Conversations between Jews, Iranians

   and Babylonians in Antiquity (ed. U. Gabbay and S. Secunda; TSAJ 160, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck,

   2014), 163–21; on Temple architecture, see Ganzel, Tova and Holtz, Shalom E., “Ezekiel's Temple in Babylonian Context.” *VT* 64 (2014): 211-26 and now Tova Ganzel, *Ezekiel's Visionary Temple in Babylonian Context* BZAW 539 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021),

   <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110740844>

   Many more examples could be cited. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Stökl, Jonathan, ““A Youth Without Blemish, Handsome, Proficient in all Wisdom, Knowledgeable and Intelligent”: Ezekiel’s Access to Babylonian Culture,” in *Exile and Return: The Babylonian Context*, edited by Jonathan Stökl and Caroline Waerzeggers. BZAW 478. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015, pp. 223-252, especially pp. 250-2 on mathematical issues, and Vanderhooft, David S., "Ezekiel in and On Babylon," *Transeuphratène* 46 (2014): 99-119 (*Mélanges André Lemaire* III) on more general issues. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. On the Aramaic scribal culture and its point of contact with cuneiform scribal culture, see Bloch 2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See Kuhrt, Amelie, “The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy,” *JSOT* 25 (1983): 83-97 on the structure of the cylinder, and on its dissemination, see Finkel Irving, *The Cyrus Cylinder: The King of Persia's Proclamation from Ancient Babylon.* London: I.B. Tauris, 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Caroline Waerzggers, “Babylonian Kingship in the Persian Period: Performance and Reception,” in Stökl, Jonathan and Caroline Waerzeggers, eds. *Exile and Return: The Babylonian Context*. BZAW 478. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015, pp. 179-223, here p. 184. For the document itself, see Irving Finkel, *The Cyrus Cylinder: The King of Persia’s Proclamation from Ancient Babylon* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2013), 4-34.   
     [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Amelie Kuhrt, “The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 25 (1983): 83-97, here p. 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Małgorzata Sandowicz, “Companions of Nabonidus,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 110 (2020): 161–175, and bibliography there, on how Nabonidus was said to have disregarded the status of the temples and the elites. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The thorny question of how to divide Isaiah 40-66 and that of Trito-Isaiah lie far beyond the thrust of this paper, which focuses on chapters 40-45. I refer here to Isaiah 40-48, a division popularized by Haran, Menahem, *Between the Former Prophecies and the New Prophecies: A Literary Historical Study in the Group of Prophecies Isaiah 40-48.* Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1963. My own view is that 40-48 composed in Babylonia, with 49-53 composed (or addressed to) along the route from Babylon to Yehud. It is customary to see 40-55 as composed by Second Isaiah, with the subsequent chapters assigned to a later author or authors known as Trito-Isaiah. For a recent summary, see Stromberg, Jacob. *Isaiah After Exile: The Author of Third Isaiah as Reader and Redactor of the Book.* Oxford: Oxford, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. On which see Machinist 2016, Aster 2017, and literature there. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Crouch, Carly L., *Israel and the Assyrians, Deuteronomy, the Succession Treaty of Esarhaddon and the Nature of Subversion*, Society of Biblical Literature, Ancient Near Eastern Monographs. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2014.*,* 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Hays, Christopher B., “Echoes of the Ancient Near East? Intertextuality and the Comparative Study of the Old Testament,” in J. Ross Wagner et al. (eds.), *The Word Leaps the Gap: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of Richard B. Hays*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008, pp. 20-43 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Crouch, 2014, p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Crouch, 2014, p. 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. TIemeyer 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Tiemeyer 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Tigay, Jeffrey H., “On Evaluating Claims of Literary Borrowing,” in William W. Hallo et al. (eds.), *The Tablet and the Scroll: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William W. Hallo.* Bethesda: CDL Press, 1993, pp. 250-255. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Translation of this and all subsequent Biblical verses are my own. On v. 1, “opposite each other,” see Holtz, Shalom E., “The Case for Adversarial Yaḥad,” VT 59 (2009): 211–221. On v. 2, note 1QIsa has ויקראהו instead of יקראהו, yielding “Who awakened victory/justice from the east, and called it to his feet?” Translation above follows MT. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. This and all subsequent citations of the cylinder are from Schaudig, Hanspeter, *Die Inschriften Nabonid von Babylon und Kyros’ des Grossen*, AOAT 256. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2001, 551-553, presented here with my normalization for ease of reference. This translation is from Mordechai Cogan, *The Raging Torrent: Historical Inscriptions from Assyria and Babylonia Related to Ancient Israel* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2015), 226-227. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. The translation “passes them peacefully” for יעבר שלום is discussed below. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Most modern historians reject the historicity of this claim. (See for example Briant, Pierre (2002). From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire. Translated by Peter T. Daniels. Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, p. 41). The ahistoricity of the claim and its appearance as a literary trope strengthens the dependence of Isaiah 41:1-4 on the arguments we know from the Cyrus cylinder. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. The Akkadian *alakšu iqbi,* lit., “commanded his walking,” is similar to the Hebrew in that both emphasize the aspect of walking on a road. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Gary A. Rendsburg, “Kabbîr in Biblical Hebrew: Evidence of Style-Switching and Addressee-Switching in the Hebrew Bible,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 112 (1992): 649-651; “Aramaic-like Features in the Pentateuch,” *Hebrew Studies* 47(2006):163-176. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. CAD Š1, 255. Paul, Shalom M. *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012, p. 160. I am indebted to my student, Igor Odintsov, for exploring the significance of this phrase in his dissertation in progress at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Paul 2012: 160, based on tan Aramaic usage found in Ahiqar. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. The methodological problem of creating (or “positing”) such a meaning is obvious, but further discussion can be found in Chaim Cohen, “The 'Held method' for comparative Semitic philologhy,” *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 19 (1989) 9-23 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Citations of Rashi and R. David Qimhi from *Mikra’ot Gedolot ‘HaKeter’*, edited by Menachem Cohen (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Tigay, Jeffrey H., “On Evaluating Claims of Literary Borrowing,” in William W. Hallo et al. (eds.), *The Tablet and the Scroll: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William W. Hallo.* Bethesda: CDL Press, 1993, pp. 250-255. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. It is also possible to understand the phrase as referring to Cyrus walking triumphantly down the *akitu* road. The Akkadian cognate of the Heb ארח is used in the phrase *uruḫ akiti* to describe the road to the *akitu* temple. See discussion of this phrase in Vanderhooft 1999, p. 178 note 211. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. This is illustrated In lines 12-13 of the cylinder: “He (i.e. Marduk) surveyed and looked throughout all the lands, searching for a righteous king, his heart’s desire, whom he would support. He called out his name, Cyrus, king of Anshan…” Rather than hiding his non-Babylonian origins, Cyrus vaunts them. As noted above (note \*\*\*), Cyrus also describes how Marduk sent him to Babylon in line 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Machinist, Peter, "Mesopotamian Imperialism and Israelite Religion: A Case Study from the Second Isaiah," in W.G. Dever and S. Gitin (eds.), Symbiosis, Symbolism and the Power of the Past: Canaan, Ancient Israel and Their Neighbors, Centennial Symposium of the W.F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research and the American Schools of Oriental Research. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003, pp. 237-264, here 245-256. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Tiemeyer 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Paul, 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Machinist 2003:250. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. The point is clearly illustrated in the Enuma Elish. See for example, [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Moshe Weinfeld, “God the Creator in Genesis 1 and in Second Isaiah” (Heb.), *Tarbiz* 37 (1969): 105-132. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Tiemeyer 88-92 and 96-98. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Isa. 45:7 is clearly part of this rhetorical unit (perhaps a slightly later addition), but I have omitted it from the discussion here in order not to engage the possible anti-Zoroastrian polemics in the phrase “Maker of light and Creator of darkness.” Those polemics would take us far from the topic of this article. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. In 45:2, 1QIsa a has הררים, rather than MT הדורים. Translation here follows MT. For other suggested translations, see Paul 253-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Tiemeyer 88, summarizing Hans M. Barstad, Barstad, Hans. “On the So‐Called Babylonian Literary Influence in Second Isaiah,” *SJOT* 2 (1987): 90-110, here 99-100. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. The parallels to Gen. 19:16, 21:18, Judg. 16:26, cited by Tiemeyer 88 all refer to people (or angels in Gen. 19:16) holding other people’s hands and are therefore irrelevant. Jeremiah 31:31, which she also cites, refers to God pulling the Israelites out of Egypt. None of these passages use the expression in the meaning of support for a person maintaining a position of authority. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Tiemeyer 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. The text is taken from Schaudig, but I have presented here my own translation, which is more literal than Cogan’s. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. For Hays, see above note 19. Note also Albright’s comment: ““it is not safe to assume original relationship or borrowing except where the motif is complex, forming a pattern.” W. F. Albright*, From the Stone Age to Christianity* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1957), 67 [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. See above, citation of line 17. \*\* At p. 91, Tiemeyer notes that the motif of bronze doors, found in Isa. 45:2, is fairly common. This ignores the larger context in which this image is used. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Tiemeyr 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. For more examples of imitation of Assyrian style in Cyrus inscription, see Kuhrt, Amelie, “The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy,” *JSOT* 25 (1983): 83-97, here 88-89. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Paul 2012:321. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)