A PARADEISOS AT RAMAT RAHEL AND THE SETTING OF ZECHARIAH

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Résumé: Le jardin récemment fouillé à Ramat Rahel dans la province perse de Yehud est interprété comme un paradeisos. Les visions du livre biblique de Zacharie se passent au paradeisos à Ramat Rahel, avec des implications pour l’idéologie et la date.

Summary: The recently-excavated garden at Ramat Rahel in the Persian province of Yehud is analysed as a paradeisos. The visions of the biblical book of Zechariah are set in the paradeisos at Ramat Rahel, with implications for ideology and date.

Mots-clés: Paradeisos, Ramat Rahel, Zacharia

Keywords: Paradeisos, Ramat Rahel, Zechariah

“I saw in the night, and look, a man riding upon a red horse, and he was standing between the myrtles which were next to the mṣlh and behind him were red, sorrel, and white horses” (Zechariah 1:8). This evocative beginning places us in a dark shadowy place, with myrtle bushes and something called a mṣlh. Readers have taken their cue from the proto-apocalyptic visionary nature of the text, and assumed that the prophet was seeing something of a heavenly or at least other-worldly nature. But what if Zechariah was standing in a real place? This possibility has largely been excluded by scholars — or if considered, the location not specifically identified. With the recent excavations at Ramat Rahel, and the discovery of a garden and imported species of plants, perhaps we now have a real possibility. Perhaps Zechariah’s visions are set in the gardens at Ramat Rahel. And since the garden had species of Persian origin, perhaps this garden was not just a garden, but a paradeisos, the Achaemenid re-creation of the ideal cosmos.

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The Garden at Ramat Rahel

Ramat Rahel is located southwest of the City of David, but is not visible from the Temple Mount. It was first excavated by Y. Aharoni in the 1950s and 1960s, but the renewed excavations of 2004-2010 have vastly increased our knowledge of the site and its importance. Although no consensus has yet been reached on its ancient name, the remains indicate that the site was the most impressive place in late Iron Age Judah and Persian period Yehud, and that it was an administrative centre for Judah/Yehud (perhaps the leading centre), particularly in the Persian period. Contrary to Aharoni’s claim (repeated in the literature since), the site was not destroyed at the end of the Iron Age; any destruction and/or repurposing of the site did not happen until the early Hellenistic period. While there were some changes to the site over the three hundred year period from the late 7th to the late 4th century BCE (to be discussed below), the basic plan of the palace structure remained unchanged. The site and its structures would have been well known in Persian period Yehud.

While the first phase of the site was a fortified tower, the second phase was a vast expansion: a palace of the bit hilani type was constructed, along with a garden. Both are dated by the recent excavations to the last part of the 7th century, based on the chronology of the Judahite stamp impressions. The palace was decorated with architectural features that are rare within Judah: the so-called proto-aeolic capitals, window balustrades familiar from the woman-at-the-window ivories, and crenellations. That the garden was a garden was established by the deep layer of brown earth fill that was deposited over flattened bedrock. The complex covered an area of at least 1.6 hectares, and, as noted, stayed in use for three centuries. The major change that occurred during that time was an expansion of the palace at the expense of the garden at some point in the fifth century.

4. Ibid., pp. 19–21.
5. Ibid., p. 23.
6. Ibid., p. 31.
A significant problem for the site is its lack of a water source. From a strategic perspective, the site was ideally positioned to keep watch on both Jerusalem and the agricultural lands of the Rephaim Valley. The excavator posits that it was built in the period of Assyrian vassalage for the Assyrian overseer, that it retained a similar function in the Babylonian period, and that it expanded in the Persian period, especially after Mizpah was abandoned in the fifth century. Yet with no natural water source, such a large complex, never mind with a garden, was an act of deliberate programmatic manipulation of the physical world. The renewed excavations found a system of pools and watercourses, with at least two pools located in the garden. One (Pool 2) measured seven by seven metres, and remained well preserved because it was filled in and used for lime in the Hellenistic period.

It is from the plaster of Pool 2 that the excavators have made perhaps their most dramatic discovery, through analysis of the pollen in the plaster. The pool was plastered twice. The first application of plaster contained the pollen of local vegetation, including olive trees and local shrubs, suggesting that the garden was cultivated, but not ostentatiously so. The second application of plaster contained pollen from imported trees, notably the citron and Persian walnut, and from water-loving trees such as willow, birch, and myrtle. Pollen from water-plants (lilies) was also found, and the proportion of the local flora pollen dropped dramatically. Both the citron tree and myrtle bush are insect-pollinated rather than wind pollinated, so they must have been located right next to the pool. Myrtle is a feature of decorative gardens, as it can be clipped to form box shapes. Taken together, the pollen evidence suggests that at some point the garden became more exotic and more decorative. This is the earliest, and in fact only, garden from Judah/Yehud attested archaeologically.

**Achaemenid Gardens**

The existence of a garden with flora of Persian origins (citron, walnut) at a palace that had its heyday in the Persian period immediately puts one

in mind of the famous paradeisoi of the Persian kings. There are two questions to examine here: first, what do we know of Achaemenid paradeisoi; and second, are the finds at Ramat Rahel consistent with a paradeisos? Our actual knowledge of Persian period gardens of the eastern Mediterranean and Mesopotamia is far scantier than what our perceived knowledge is. Excavations at well-known satrapal and provincial centres such as Sardis have not yielded gardens. It may well be that the garden at Ramat Rahel will become a prime example of an Achaemenid-era garden.

The only Achaemenid garden in the Persian heartland attested archaeologically is the one at Pasargadae, excavated by D. Stronach in the early 1960s. As until recently this has been the only attested Achaemenid garden, it has been drawn on considerably in the literature—perhaps more than is warranted. The site has long been associated with Cyrus, although Darius seems to have finished the work there. The main evidence for the gardens is the series of watercourses and basins that divide up an area between the palaces. Two pavilions and one palace provided the only entryways into the garden. The garden itself, at least based on the layout of the watercourses, was made up of one large quarter-sectioned square and several long rectangular walks. No pollen analysis was done, and the excavation report does not have detail on the soil or on how the site was prepared or shaped, other than to note the very gradual slope. The recent geomagnetic surveys and surface scans of the site have confirmed the garden’s layout, and have provided more data for the relationship of the gardens to other parts of the site. The large water basin found by the surveys attests to water-intensive activities at the site: it was trapezoidal, measuring 195 and 200 metres along the sides and 61 and 26 metres on the ends, with a depth of 1.5 metres.

Recently, surveys and excavations have produced evidence of gardens in the northern part of the empire, at Karačamirli in the Caucasus. At

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Karačamirli, surveys revealed a wall enclosing an area measuring 450 by 425 metres, with a palace structure inside; pottery and architectural finds suggest an early- to mid-5th century BCE date. The investigators suggest that this area was a *paradeisos*. Palynological analysis of the area resulted in finding grape-vines and peach-trees, which were probably imported species. The reconstructed layout resembles Pasargadæ.

It seems likely that an Achaemenid-era garden was excavated at Samaria in the Crowfoot-Kenyon expeditions of the 1930s. As the Ramat Rahel investigators note, “a very similar garden was discovered [in Samaria], even if not well understood by its excavators”. A similar layer of brown earth fill as that of Ramat Rahel was deposited over a flattened area: the fill contained Attic potsherds dating to the 6th and 5th centuries; thus the garden cannot date to earlier than the 5th century. Three things are different from Ramat Rahel: first, the evidence suggests that the pre-5th century building remains were destroyed and covered by the garden, indicating a new garden rather than a repurposed garden; second, a boundary wall was discovered, providing an enclosed garden space; and third, there is no evidence for a water system.

C. Tuplin’s analysis of the ancient sources on *paradeisoi* is thorough and still the best available. The first thing he does is examine the evidence for the argument that the *paradeisos* was borrowed from the Assyrians. He concludes that the Assyrian reliefs and inscriptions depict four types of landscape: “unenclosed parkland”, “enclosed gardens”, “lion-hunt arena”, and “open country in which some lesser prey are hunted”, and that there is nothing to require “blur[ring] the distinctions apparent in the iconography”, thus suggesting that wild animal enclosures were not also enclosed gardens. He also concludes that the modern definition of a *paradeisos* as a combination of hunting grounds and pleasure garden

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15. Ibid., p. 23.
16. Ibid., pp. 18–19.
21. There was a cistern system below the area of the garden, used until the end of the Roman period, but because of disruptions to the stratigraphy, it was not possible to determine whether it was in use during the Persian period at the site. Cf. Crowfoot-Kenyon-Sukenik, *ops. cit.* (n. 17), p. 115.
is wrong, both in the analysis of the Assyrian materials and in the analysis of the Achaemenid materials. There may be a connection between the Assyrian royal gardens and the Achaemenid paradeisos, but the available data does not allow for detailed elaboration.\footnote{Ibid., p. 87.}

There is only one possible attestation of the Old Persian word paridaida (paradise) in the Old Persian inscriptions (A\textsuperscript{2}Sd), and the word is broken and hence can be reconstructed also as pariyada (“consecrated”).\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 93; all references to Old Persian inscriptions follow R. Schmitt, \textit{Die alt-persischen Inschriften der Achaemeniden}, Wiesbaden 2009.} Elamite Achaemenid-era texts from the Persepolis Fortification tablets refer to something called \textit{partetaš},\footnote{Tuplin, \textit{op. cit.} (n. 22), pp. 93–96; cf. W.F.M. Henkelman, \textit{The Other Gods Who Are: Studies in Elamite-Iranian Acculturation Based on the Persepolis Fortification Texts}, A&H 14, Leiden 2008, p. 428.} and Akkadian texts from the period of Cyrus refer to \textit{pardesu}.\footnote{Tuplin, \textit{op. cit.} (n. 22), p. 113, and the references there.} All of the other evidence is Greek or Hebrew, and much of it considerably later than the Persian period. In fact, the earliest attestation of the Greek word \textit{paradeisos} is in the Xenophontic corpus of the early to mid-fourth century BCE. The basic etymology of the word is Old Persian paridaida or Median *paridaiza, meaning “walled about” or “enclosed”.

C. Tuplin’s analysis of the written sources, primarily classical, suggests that only Xenophon connected the \textit{paradeisos} in any way with hunting, and given Xenophon’s general concerns—the man did write a treatise on hunting—this may say more about Xenophon than about the general nature of \textit{paradeisoj}. Both the Persepolis Fortification tablets and the Greek sources suggest that beyond being enclosed, the \textit{paradeisos} did not differ from a regular garden or orchard in terms of scale: a \textit{paradeisos} was not necessarily large (perhaps one hectare, the size of what North American city planners call a “pocket” or “neighbourhood” park). A \textit{paradeisos} was not only or necessarily a pleasure garden, especially if the Elamite texts are considered; a \textit{paradeisos} was a functioning and productive piece of agricultural land. In sum, Tuplin concludes that what made a \textit{paradeisos} was its association with Persian royalty and/or satrapies, and that it was not a sacred grove of the Greek sort.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 126.} Its other specific features probably included: a planned and regular design, distinctiveness from its surrounding landscape as well as enclosure, a
A combination of both fruit and non-fruit trees, perhaps flowers, and an abundance of water.\textsuperscript{28}

W.F.M. Henkelman’s recent discussion of the \textit{lan} sacrifice in the Elamite Persepolis Fortification Tablets provides the only real updating of Tuplin’s analysis. One Elamite tablet mentions the \textit{lan} sacrifice taking place in the \textit{partetaš} of Pasagardae. There are twenty-two \textit{partetaš} referred to in the collection, so Henkelman posits that the one mention of the \textit{lan} sacrifice indicates that it was an exceptional case and not the usual practice within the \textit{partetaš}.\textsuperscript{29} W.F.M. Henkelman defines the Elamite \textit{partetaš} as “an administrative term, denot[ing] primarily a production and storage unit”.\textsuperscript{30} He also suggests that there is circumstantial evidence for cultic activity in Achaemenid gardens, and that the Elamite precursors for the \textit{paradeisos} should not be overlooked.\textsuperscript{31}

B. Lincoln has recently approached the question of the \textit{paradeisos} from the Iranian perspective.\textsuperscript{32} Since the Old Persian occurrence of \textit{paridaida} is disputed, he uses the Old Persian corpus as a whole in reconstructing the cosmology of the Achaemenids, and from there, to argue for the \textit{paridaida}’s place in it. By looking at the broader ideological system, he is able to get at the underlying purpose of the \textit{paradeisos}, beyond the simply functional purpose of provision for the royal estate and a pleasant place for Achaemenid royalty and nobility to spend some time. His main argument is that the \textit{paradeisos} played a crucial role in the entire Achaemenid cosmological system.

Beginning with C. Herrenschmidt’s insights into the creation of earth, sky, humanity and \textit{šiyati} for humanity,\textsuperscript{33} B. Lincoln demonstrates that Darius I portrayed himself and probably saw himself as having a role in the restoration of a cosmos harmed by the Lie. In the Bisitun inscription, Darius narrated his coming to power as a fight against those who lied, and by lying ruptured the cosmic order. Similarly, Ahuramazda’s original created order was a pleasant world in full harmony. At some point, this harmony was disrupted, leading to the physical world as we know it, with its attendant ills of disease and famine. Darius’ role, therefore, was to also...

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., pp. 126–7.
\textsuperscript{29} Henkelman, \textit{op. cit.} (n. 25), pp. 429–30.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 331.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., pp. 440–52.
bring the physical world back to Ahuramazda’s perfect creation. This
could be done by routing out the Lie, or on a political level, expanding
the empire to encompass the whole earth.\textsuperscript{34}

As the empire expanded, the \textit{paradeisoi} were created as miniatures of
the perfect creation: full of water and a variety of lush vegetation. The
wall or enclosure kept the imperfect world out of the perfect world; B.
Lincoln has demonstrated elsewhere the importance of boundaries in
Achaemenid thought.\textsuperscript{35} But ultimately the \textit{paradeisoi} would not be
enclosed, once the entire world had been returned to the perfect cosmic
order of Ahuramazda’s creation. This perfect cosmic order would contain
all the diversity of the natural world in harmony, just as the empire
contained the diversity of the human world in harmony. It would be
necessary, therefore, for all the \textit{paradeisoi} of the empire to contain spe-
cies from different parts of the empire.

As M.C. Root has pointed out, in the iconography of the Achaemenids
there is nothing to distinguish one king from another.\textsuperscript{36} They all look
the same—and even their tombs are almost identical, and except for that of
Darius I, unlabeled. Darius may therefore be seen as the exemplar or
stand-in for all his successors. It was the role of the king that was impor-
tant, not who inhabited the role. (This was the ideological position, to
which the actual palace intrigues of the Achaemenids were not relevant.)
The concern for individuals that we see in the Greek and Hebrew texts
is simply not present in the Achaemenids’ depictions of themselves.
Nevertheless, what is crucial to this understanding of the Persian Empire
is a rather sharp ideological rupture between Cyrus/Cambyses and Darius
I (perhaps the best evidence is the shift in burial practices).\textsuperscript{37} While Cyrus
may have pieced together the Persian Empire, it was Darius that gave it
its founding narrative and ideology. The extent of this ideological rupture
is still debated by Iranists.

One problem with B. Lincoln’s reconstruction of the Achaemenid ideo-
logy of the \textit{paradeisos} is the evidence in Akkadian for \textit{pardesu} during

\textsuperscript{34} Lincoln, \textit{loc. cit.} (n. 32), pp. 3–19, 446–61; C. Herrenschmidt and B. Lincoln,
“Healing and Salt Waters: The Bifurcated Cosmos of Mazdaean Religion”, \textit{History of

\textsuperscript{35} B. Lincoln, \textit{Religion, Empire, and Torture: The Case of Achaemenian Persia, with
a Postscript on Abu Ghraib}, Chicago 2007, pp. 83–96.

\textsuperscript{36} M.C. Root, \textit{The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art}, Aclr 9, Leiden 1979, p. 310.

\textsuperscript{37} B. Jacobs, “From Gabled Hut to Rock-Cut Tomb: A Religious and Cultural Break
between Cyrus and Darius?” in J. Curtis and S.J. Simpson eds, \textit{The World of Achaemenid
Persia: History, Art and Society in Iran and the Ancient Near East}, London 2010,
pp. 91–102.
the reign of Cyrus. Since all of the languages of the western Persian
Empire had words for “orchard”, “garden”, “vineyard”, etc., this Iranian
loan-word should only have been adopted if it signified something quite
different, or perhaps signified a certain prestige. So did Cyrus also hold
to the cosmology expressed by Darius? Added to this, a full century of
Achaemenid rule and Greek writing about the Greek encounter with the
Achaemenids passed before the word paradeisos was adopted into Greek
as expressing something peculiarly Achaemenid. Surely Herodotus, an
Ionian, who must have seen Anatolian cities such as Sardis that were
Achaemenid centres, would have mentioned the special interest the
Achaemenids had for these enclosed garden-parks. But he did not, so
Tuplin suggests that what he saw was not so outlandish that he needed
to explicate it.38

It is possible that the meaning of Old Persian paridaida changed over
time, and that it came to have an overtly ideological function only later
during the Achaemenid period. Analogy can be drawn with Old Persian
bumi, which originally simply meant “earth/world”, and only in the later
inscriptions of Darius I came also to have the connotation of “empire”.39
Perhaps the paridaida was originally simply a walled park-garden of
mixed species—of the type known from previous empires such as the
Assyrian—and only later came to be imbued with greater ideological
significance.

So is the garden at Ramat Rahel a paradeisos? It contained a
sophisticated water system that was also decorative, including large pools
of water in a location with no natural water-source. In its later phase, it
contained a variety of vegetation, some fruit-bearing (citron, walnut), and
some decorative (myrtle, water-lily). It was enclosed on one side by the
palace building; unfortunately, excavations have not revealed whether
there were walls all around the garden.40 Unlike at Pasargadae, there is
no clear indication of garden layout, or even how the garden was
accessed. Perhaps the Ramat Rahel garden’s non-conforming plan was
due to the conversion of an already-existing garden, in comparison to the
Pasargadae and Karačamirli structures that were new construction.

39. C. Herrenschmidt, “Désignations de l’empire et concepts politiques de Darius 1er
40. In Samaria, the situation is reversed: a wall enclosed the garden, but because of
the period of the excavations, no palynology is available. The availability of water is also
unresolved.
The crucial factor has to be the palynology. In its earlier phase, the water system and palace wall were present. What was missing was the variety of vegetation from a number of regions. Only local plant varieties were present, especially those that are not particularly water intensive. In the later phase, there was a greater diversity of varieties, and a greater number of water-intensive varieties. The insect-pollinated citron and myrtle must have been next to Pool 2, suggesting a planned layout. The presence of myrtle itself—a favourite of decorative gardens because it can be shaped—also suggests a planned layout. Perhaps the myrtle provided a border on one side of the pool.

On the whole, the evidence supports identifying the garden at Ramat Rahel as a paradeisos. This identification unlocks further implications for the history and purpose of the site. In its first phase, which began in the late 7th century and continued through the 6th century, the garden probably existed as a typical estate garden and water storage facility. If the transition in the ideological significance of paradaida occurred during the reign of Darius I (as seems reasonable), the existing garden was converted to a paradeisos at some point subsequent to the beginning of his rule in 522 BCE, and most likely not immediately: the early 5th century is more likely than the late 6th century. Considering that the Greek literary evidence suggests the paradeisos concept was well-established by the early 4th century, and that the paradeisoi were constructed at Persian royal, satrapal, and gubernatorial residences, it is most likely that Ramat Rahel was the Persian governor’s residence throughout the 5th and 4th centuries, until the coming of Alexander. As well, given the highly charged ideological function of the paradeisos within the Achaemenid system, it is likely that the resident governor was Persian.41 Finally, if this was the governor’s residence, its decoration was most likely a local adaptation of the Persian court style, meaning that wall paintings, carved

41. At least one governor of Yehud had a Persian name; Bagavahya (often transcribed as Bagohi) is known from the Elephantine correspondence. The evidence for the names of the governors of Yehud is lucidly presented and analyzed in L.L. Grabbe, A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period, Volume 1. Yehud: A History of the Persian Province of Judah, LSTS 47, London 2004, pp. 148–149. The other governors known from epigraphic (i.e. non-biblical) sources have Yahwistic or more broadly West Semitic names, while the governors known from Ezra-Nehemiah have either Babylonian (Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel) or Yahwistic (Nehemiah) names. Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel are presented as being Judahites from the Davidic family. However, we do not possess anything like a complete list of the governors. If the situation in the province of Samaria is analogous, the governorship may have passed through a family line, with each new governor confirmed by the Achaemenid king (P. Briant, From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire, Winona Lake 2002, p. 714).
relief elements, carpets, hangings, and small decorations would have had typical elements such as thewinged disk, protective genies and archers, heroic encounter scenes, stylized animals, and so on. This is only conjecture at this point as such remains have not been found at the site. The recent books by E.R.M. Dusinberre on Achaemenid Anatolia may give us some helpful analogies for the situation in Yehud. E.R.M. Dusinberre notes that the Persianized iconography of Anatolia is so regular that the inescapable conclusion is that there was an imperial standard taught to all artists; she calls this a “koine Achaemenid hegemonic iconographic language”. An excellent example is a gold clothing applique from Sardis. We might compare the transmission of chancellery Aramaic, found from Egypt to Bactria. Therefore, even if the governor was a Juda- hite, it is likely that the decoration of his residence(s) was in a standard Achaemenid style.

**Setting Zechariah in the Paradeisos**

Since fifth century Yehud was scantily developed and scarcely populated, the governor’s palace and *paradeisos* would have been highly visible, and among the elite, well-known. I suggest that we might read Zechariah’s visions as being set in the *paradeisos* at Ramat Rahel. It may well be that the *paradeisos* at Ramat Rahel was known as a place to have visions. The excavator has said that within the palace a deposit of chicken bones in a vessel was found, and that the vessel has narcotic residue (personal communication). While the *paradeisos* would not have been the place for eating and drinking — eating and drinking outside was considered barbaric — it may have been a place to go after the eating and drinking. As for the narcotic, while it is still debated by Iranists, it seems that *haoma*, a narcotic, was used as part of Achaemenid rituals.

Zechariah’s first vision opens with, “I saw in the night, and look, a man was riding upon a red horse, and he was stationed between the

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43. Ibid., p. 249.
myrtles which are *bmṣlh*, and behind him were red, sorrel and white horses” (Zechariah 1:8). There are two important features to note here. First is the myrtles, which are mentioned three times, in vv. 8, 10, 11, with the man who has been identified as a messenger of Yhwh riding the red horse standing between them. Myrtles are relatively rare in the Hebrew Bible, occurring here and in Isaiah 41:19, 55:13, and Nehemiah 8:15. In Isaiah 41:19, myrtles being planted in the wilderness are a sign of Yhwh’s return and restoration; in Isaiah 55:13, myrtles will replace briers in Yhwh’s new creation. In Nehemiah 8:14, myrtles are used to create booths for Sukkot. While it is tempting, and certainly possible, to interpret the myrtles symbolically as a sign of hope, what if they are just myrtles?

This brings us to the second issue, the location of the myrtles: *bmṣlh*, in/on/by the *meṣula*. This hapax legomenon is construed by C.L. Meyers and E.M. Meyers as derived from *ṣll*, “shadow”, and thus the myrtles are located in deep darkness. More commonly, the word is construed as derived from *swl*, “hollow”, and translated as “depth”, “bottom”, or “Basin”. Regardless, the place is seen as a vision-place, perhaps in the heavens, or as part of an other-worldly journey of the sort seen in *Enoch*. I also would construe *mṣlh* as from *swl*, but suggest it refers to a pool. More specifically, it is a real pool, Pool 2 at Ramat Rahel, where the myrtles grew nearby. In Achaemenid Yehud, there could have been only one pool with myrtles nearby—Yehud was extremely undeveloped—and so any elite readers/hearers would immediately have associated the vision with the governor’s palace and *paradeisos*. Regardless if this was a real vision that occurred at that place, the story-account is set there.

In the next vision, Zechariah first sees four horns (*qrnwt*) in Zechariah 2:1. These horns are often associated with four-horned altars, or perhaps with anvils, given the *ḥršym*, “craftsmen”, about to appear in v. 3. Petersen argues for altars, noting that *ḥrš* is most often associated with metalworking, but in a few cases is associated with stone-masonry, cf. 1 Chronicles 22:15. However, paying attention to the verb of seeing here is relevant: *wʾśʾʿt-ʿyny*, “I lifted up my eyes”, that is, “I looked up”. Standing in the *paradeisos* of Ramat Rahel and looking up, one would have seen the crenellations on the tops of the walls. These crenellations

50. So Petersen, *op. cit.* (n. 48), p. 139.
may have been part of the late Iron Age construction of the palace, like the volute capitals, but crenellations and triangle shapes in general had an important iconographic function in Achaemenid monumental art. There were crenellations in the Susa reliefs, representing the palace backdrop; crenellations are still visible in the ruins of the Persepolis apadana stairway; and Darius’ crown is crenellated both at Bisitun and the Persepolis apadana relief. In the vision, the horns represent the nations, and since the crenellations were definitely a sign of imperialized architecture, it would not be a stretch to associate the crenellations with the nations. The craftsmen who come to frighten and throw down the horns are easily understood as stone-masons who would chip out and throw down crenellations.

From this point on, the visions become more and more fantastic, and more difficult to correlate with the architectural remains of Ramat Rahel. The vision of Zechariah 3 clearly takes place in the heavenly court, in the presence of the deity, but when it is over, the messenger returns and awakens Zechariah (", "as a man is wakened from his sleep" (Zechariah 4:1). Nevertheless, the first three visions are “real”: man on red horse, four horns, man with measuring line; in a real place, the paradeisos, while the fourth vision is a dream. The remaining visions also take place in the paradeisos, and the imagery becomes more fantastic with each one. I mention only one more, the flying scroll of Zechariah 5:1.

The flying scroll that Zechariah looks up to see in Zechariah 5:1 does not take much to identify. The flying sun-disk, the symbol of Ahuramazda and used on the Achaemenid reliefs and seals, would easily be identifiable as a flying scroll seen from one of the ends. There were two forms of the winged disk: one with a bearded figure emerging from it, and the other a simple disk with long wings. The latter form is obviously what a scroll would look like on end. The disk was often placed high up in the Achaemenid palaces: one would look up to see it, as Zechariah does here.

Athuramazda and his chosen instrument Darius were opponents of the Lie (drauga) as the rupturing of divine order (arta). In Zechariah 5:4, it is the one who swears falsely (šqr) and the thief (gnb) who are punished by the flying scroll. This is an appropriation of Achaemenid theology for Yhwh; Yhwh is not generally characterized with opposition to the thief and liar as his primary feature. Here these figures are elevated to the status of the primary evil-doers that are destroyed by Yhwh’s flying scroll. A second possibility for interpreting the flying scroll does not rely on the identification with the sun-disk but on the importance of the written word for routing out the Lie. At Bisitun (DB 4.88-92), Darius proclaims that the narrative was written down and sent throughout the lands. Symbolically, that act carried the destruction of the Lie and the liars throughout all the places that he himself could not get to personally.

Implications

What are the implications of this little experiment of reading Zechariah’s visions as being set at Ramat Rahel? These may be sorted into two categories: ideology and date. Ideologically, reading Zechariah’s visions at Ramat Rahel highlights the Achaemenid iconography and symbolism of the visions. As the locus of Achaemenid power, it would have presented a great contrast to unfortified and temple-less Jerusalem. Yet Yhwh’s goal in the visions—Jerusalem without walls, with all the Yehudites restored to it—is the opposite yet the same as the Achaemenid goal.

The paradeisos with its wall demarcated the re-creation of cosmic order separated from the damaged world outside. Scattered throughout the empire, the diversity of the empire was represented within those walls, just as the scattered goods of the empire were brought together in the heart of the empire at Persepolis. Jerusalem with its wall of Yhwh’s fire would demarcate Yhwh’s order protected from the damaged world outside. Its scattered people would be gathered together in Yhwh’s centre, not the Achaemenids’.

Who is the visionary in the text, the un-named “I”? The frame names him as Zechariah, and perhaps he is. He is a member of the elite, who can partake in the banquets of the governor and stroll in the paradeisos. He understands the ideology and the iconography of the Achaemenids,

56. Petersen, op. cit. (n. 48), pp. 249–53 strives mightily to link these two characteristics with the Decalogue; cf. Meyers-Meyers, op. cit. (n. 49), pp. 284–86.
57. Cf. Root, op. cit. (n. 36); Lincoln, op. cit. (n. 32).
but also adheres to the deity Yhwh. Dreaming his visions of Yhwh’s triumph while standing in the local centre of imperial power is a deeply subversive act.

As for dating, the visions themselves are undated. They gain their date from their location within the frame story, between the second and fourth years of Darius: 521-519 BCE. But there would have been no paradeisos at Ramat Rahel at that time. If the visions are set at Ramat Rahel, they must be from the later part of Darius’ reign, at the earliest. As such, they are from the middle of the Persian period rather than the early Persian period.

**Conclusion**

Rather than reading Zechariah 1-6 as set in Jerusalem or the heavenly court, we might read the visions as being set at Ramat Rahel. The palace and paradeisos there were likely a major site of the Persian government of the province of Yehud. By reading the visions as set at Ramat Rahel, the imagery of the visions can take on different meanings from those usually named in the scholarship.

We should note that Jerusalem was a small site in this period, and Ramat Rahel would have been much more impressive. The question remains, how come this prominent site is not mentioned in any biblical text in such a way that we can identify it? Beit-Hakkerem is the likely name (Jeremiah 6:1; Nehemiah 3:14), according to a number of scholars. In the underdeveloped Yehud of the Persian period, this site would have been well known. Perhaps it was erased from the written memory just as it was destroyed at the end of the Persian period. It was dug up and rooted out just as Yhwh cast out wickedness in Zechariah 5.