



‘EZRĀ-NĀMA

‘EZRĀ-NĀMA, paraphrased versification of the Book of ‘Ezrā (q.v.) containing midrashic and Iranian legends. It was composed by Šāhīn (q.v.), the leading Judeo-Persian poet of the 14th century. ‘*Ezrā-nāma*, which includes about 500 distichs, is generally found at the end of Šāhīn’s *Ardašīr-nāma* (q.v.) and is composed in the same meter; the date of its composition was thus probably the same as that of the latter work, Šawwāl 773/April-May 1372.

The main part of ‘*Ezrā-nāma* deals with the story of the Cyrus the Great, who was called “God’s messiah” (cf. Isaiah 45:1). According to ‘*Ezrā-nāma*, Cyrus was born of Esther and Ahasuerus (q.v.), king of Persia, a legend most probably created to answer two important questions that were debated and elaborated in the Talmud and the midrashim: why a gentile was elected “God’s messiah” and why the miraculous delivery of the Jews from Babylonian exile was at Cyrus’ hand. In the second targum of the Book of Esther (q.v.), Cyrus is said to be seated on the throne of the King Solomon, an honor that had not been granted to the kings of Israel (cf. Megillah 12a; Rosh ha-Shanah 3b; Song of Songs Rabbah v, 5; Ecclesiastes Rabbah x, 12). The arguments and reservations expressed in the Jewish sources are not echoed in ‘*Ezrā-nāma*, however; Šāhīn indicated no doubt that Cyrus was Esther’s son and thus, according to Jewish law, a Jew. This legendary descent also was also mentioned by Ṭabarī (I, pp. 654, 688, 691, 718). In ‘*Ezrā-nāma* Cyrus’ birth is depicted as the gift of God, Who bestowed all beauty and goodness on the child; he is presented as a godly figure of no less stature than the prophets and kings of Israel. His justice, truthfulness, and heroism are unparalleled among



the kings of the world.

After retelling the story of the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar, Šāhīn narrated the struggle undertaken by ‘Ezrā and other Jewish leaders of the Diaspora to prevent the extinction of the community. ‘Ezrā urges them to meet Cyrus, open to him the secret of their peoplehood, and ask him to liberate them from the torture of exile and return them to their Holy Land. The drama of the liberation of the Jews and restoration of their national existence is superbly depicted in *‘Ezrā-nāma*. Cyrus dies a hero, a king who has ruled according to the will of God. A long eulogy brings to an end this part of *‘Ezrā-nāma*. Šāhīn concludes his composition by describing the death of Esther and Mordechai (q.v.), her adoptive father, and their burial in the city of Hamadān.

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