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The publication of Neo-Babylonian cuneiform texts is rarely of great interest for both biblical scholars and Assyriologists, but this holds true for the 103 tablets in the collection of David Sofer published by Laurie E. Pearce and Cornelia Wunsch. Tablets originating from Āl-Yāhūdu (“the Town of Judah”), Našar, and other localities in the Babylonian countryside provide us with unique evidence of Judean communities during and after the period commonly referred to as “the Babylonian exile”. For the first time, it is possible to study a substantial group of texts in which Judeans appear as protagonists, not mostly on the fringes of archives owned by others.¹ The present documents will be later complemented by an additional 97 texts edited by Wunsch in collaboration with Pearce, to be

¹ The other main sources for the study of Judeans in Babylonia are the palace archive of Nebuchadnezzar II, for which see Ernst F. Weidner, Jojachin, König von Juda, in *Babylonischen Keilschrifttexten*, pp. 923–935 in *Mélanges syriens offerts à Monsieur René Dussaud par ses amis et ses élèves 2* (Bibliothèque archéologique et historique 30), Paris: Geuthner, 1939; the tablets relating to a family of Judean royal merchants in Sippar, for which see Yigal Bloch, *Judeans in Sippar and Susa during the First Century of the Babylonian Exile: Assimilation and Perseverance under Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid Rule*, pp. 119–172 in *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern History* 1 (2014); and the Murašû archive, for which see Matthew W. Stolper, *Entrepreneurs and Empire: The Murašû Archive, the Murašû Firm, and the Persian Rule in Babylonia* (Uitgaven van het Nederlands historisch-archaeologisch instituut te Istanbul 54), Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1985, and Ran Zadok, *The Earliest Diaspora: Israelites and Judeans in Pre-Hellenistic Mesopotamia* (Publications of the Diaspora Research Institute 151), Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2002. In addi-

published as *Babylonische Archive* (BaAr) 6 (pp. vii, xxxviii–xlii).

The present volume (hereafter CUSAS 28) consists of a short introduction to the texts and naming practices attested in the corpus, comprehensive analysis of personal names, and an edition of the texts with cuneiform copies, transliterations, translations, and commentary. The chronological list of texts and the indices of personal and geographical names include the data from the companion volume BaAr 6 as well and are thus very helpful for the reader. Finally, high-quality photographs of the tablets allow readers to compare the cuneiform copies and transliterations to the signs on the tablets.

The first seven texts of the corpus were published by Francis Joannès and André Lemaire already in 1996, and four additional texts were published in 1999–2007.² When we add these eleven texts to the 103 published in the present volume and 97 to be published in BaAr 6, the total number of the texts exceeds two hundred. The number of unpublished texts may be even higher, because the tablets originate from uncontrolled excavations, and they have found their way to several private collections, including those of Shlomo Moussaieff, David Sofer, and Martin Schøyen. The lack of a documented archaeological find-spot and the very limited information about the total number and dispersal history of the tablets complicate any attempt to study them. Moreover, the origin of the tablets is not merely a methodological problem but also an ethical one. The reader would like to find a discussion of these issues in the introduction of the present volume, but, unfortunately, only the simple fact of the tablets' unprovenanced origin and its methodological consequences is stated (pp. 3–9). No attempt is made to address the dispersal history of the tablets or ethical problems that arise with their trade and publication.

tion, there are a number of miscellaneous but important documents, which belong to various private and institutional archives from the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, for which see Zadok 2002.

² Francis Joannès and André Lemaire, *Contrats babyloniens d'époque achéménide du Bît-Abî râm avec une épigraphe araméenne*, pp. 41–60 in *Revue d'Assyriologie et d'Archéologie Orientale* 90 (1996); Joannès and Lemaire, *Trois tablettes cunéiformes à onomastique ouest-sémitique* (collection Sh. Moussaieff), pp. 17–34 in *Transeuphratène* 17 (1999); Kathleen Abraham, *West Semitic and Judean Brides in Cuneiform Sources from the Sixth Century BCE: New Evidence from a Marriage Contract from Āl-Yahudu*, pp. 198–219 in *Archiv für Orientforschung* 51 (2005/2006); Abraham, *An Inheritance Division among Judeans in Babylonia from the Early Persian Period*, pp. 206–221 in *New Seals and Inscriptions, Hebrew, Idumean, and Cuneiform*, ed. by Meir Lubetski (*Hebrew Bible Monographs* 8), Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007.

Any conclusions based on the present volume will remain premature as long as the rest of the texts remain unpublished. However, some patterns emerge from the published texts and from the information provided in the introduction and indices of CUSAS 28. The corpus spans from the thirty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar II (572 BCE) to the ninth year of Xerxes (477 BCE), thus covering most of the so-called exilic and the beginning of the post-exilic period. These texts and the Murašû archive from the last half of the fifth century BCE show the continuous presence of Judeans in Babylonia for almost two centuries, and nothing in the texts suggests that a significant proportion of the Judean population migrated from Babylonia at any point in time. Accordingly, it may not be reasonable to dichotomise between the exilic and post-exilic periods: the exile came into being after the deportations but never came to an end, and the Judean community slowly became rooted in Babylonian society. Quite surprisingly, the authors of the present volume still attribute the Murašû archive to the post-exilic period (p. 5).

Even though edited together and apparently found in the same archaeological context, the texts do not constitute one ancient archive but are assigned to three groups in the present volume. Of the texts published in CUSAS 28, roughly one half belong to group 1, another half to group 2, and only two texts to group 3. The core texts of the first two groups relate to the activities of two Judean men, Ahīqam, son of Rapā-Yāma, in group 1 and Ahīqar, son of Rīmūt, in group 2. Some of their family members also appear as active protagonists, thus allowing us to observe developments over several generations. Some twenty-five texts do not mention any of the protagonists but can be linked to the main groups via other persons mentioned in the texts. For now, the most enigmatic texts are those related to the Babylonian official Zababa-šar-ušur, seven of which were published by Joannès and Lemaire in 1996 and two of which are published in CUSAS 28 as belonging to group 3. As the majority of the texts from group 3 remain unpublished, their contents and connections with the other two groups remain elusive.

The three groups are not independent: groups 1 and 2 are most concretely connected by the scribe Arad-Gula and his son Bēl-upehhir. The former wrote most of the tablets mentioning Ahīqar but also one referring to Ahīqam (no. 13), and the latter is attested in several documents pertaining to Ahīqar, one to Ahīqam (no. 13), and one to Ahīqam's son Nir-Yāma (no. 32). According to the present volume, group 3 can be linked with group 2 as well (p. 9). The number of truly isolated texts in CUSAS 28 is very small, comprising only nos. 52–54, the first two of which are the latest texts in the corpus. However, no. 52 refers to a person

with a Yahwistic name and nos. 53 and 54 refer to Āl-Yāhūdu, which suggests that the tablets originated in the same environment as the other texts.

Only the documents in group 1 can legitimately be referred to as “Āl-Yāhūdu texts”, since the town was the focal point of Ahīqam’s activities but rarely mentioned in the texts of the other two groups. Āl-Yāhūdu was one of the numerous twin towns located in the Babylonian countryside and named after the geographic origin of their inhabitants.³ In the earliest two documents from Āl-Yāhūdu from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II, the place name was written with the gentilic ending as Āl-Yāhūdāia, “the town of the Judeans” (p. 6; no. 1, BaAr 6 1). Combining this evidence with the wealth of Yahwistic names attested in Āl-Yāhūdu, it appears that Judean deportees were settled in this agricultural community in the early sixth century BCE. Like many other deportees, the Judeans were integrated into the land-for-service sector of the Babylonian economy, already functional in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II but best known from the Murašû archive from the late fifth century BCE. Royal lands were given to people, often of foreign origin, who were obliged to provide the state with manpower, whether by paying taxes, performing work and military service, or hiring a substitute.

Both Ahīqam and Ahīqar probably held a parcel of royal land,⁴ but they also got involved in the running of the land-for-service sector in the surroundings of Āl-Yāhūdu and Našar, the latter of which was the focal point of Ahīqar’s activities. Both villages were located in close proximity: a substitute of the *dēkû* (“summoner” for taxes and service) of Āl-Yāhūdu collected taxes in Našar (no. 83), and a document written in Našar refers to a future delivery of dates in Āl-Yāhūdu (no. 84). Ahīqam worked as a middleman between the administrators of the land-for-service sector and the Judean landholders, and, paying a lump sum to the former, he bought rights to collect rental payments from the latter. At the same time, he ran a beer brewing and retail business in the city of Babylon, which let him convert produce into silver. By contrast, Ahīqar granted credit to landholders to help them pay their rents and fulfil their service obligations, but he also organised agricultural management of the fields he held. It is possible

that the activities of both men belong to the private sphere, but Ahīqam’s intermediary role in rental payments may suggest that he also represented the Judean community to the Babylonian authorities. However, administrative and entrepreneurial activities do not need to be mutually exclusive, and business-like behaviour could benefit the entrepreneur, state administration, and local farming community at the same time.

Ahīqam and Ahīqar benefited from the land-for-service sector and from the opportunities it provided for local business-minded people. However, their activities do not represent the life of the average Judean small farmer who cultivated a parcel of state land and was supposed to pay taxes and perform work or military service. The Judean farmers were not slaves but tied to the land-for-service sector by the land they held and the obligations they had to fulfil. There is no reason to suppose that their life was any harder than the life of a peasant in Judah, but given that some Judeans in Āl-Yāhūdu and Našar were obviously literate⁵ and that the Hebrew Bible refers to the deportations of the upper class, quite some members of the Judean elite may have ended up tilling land in the Babylonian countryside. If this was the case, life in Āl-Yāhūdu was undeniably harsher than it used to be in Jerusalem.

A peculiar feature of the three text groups is their chronological division: both Ahīqam and Ahīqar are attested already in the reign of Cyrus, but Ahīqar’s activity started to rise in the seventh year of Cyrus and peaked between the eighth year of Cambyses and the third year of Darius, whereas most of the Ahīqam texts were written between the fourth and fifteenth years of Darius. Finally, Zababa-šar-ušur is first attested in the first year of Darius, but he was most active between the nineteenth and twenty-eighth years of Darius. The three successive phases of peak activity may be a coincidence, but given the links between the three groups and the likelihood that they were all unearthed from the same place, we should seriously consider the possibility that at least the Ahīqam and Ahīqar text groups were somehow related. These two men are never mentioned in one document, they had very few common acquaintances, and the focal points of their activities were different. However, they were both Judeans, lived in the same area at the same time, pursued a career in the land-for-service sector, and, most surprisingly, their families had a similar taste of names. If their genealogies are correctly reconstructed, they both had a paternal grandfather called Samak-Yāma and a son called Nīr-Yāma (pp. 7–9,

³ For the term “twin town”, see Muhammad Dandamayev, *Twin Towns and Ethnic Minorities in First-Millennium Babylonia*, pp. 137–151 in *Commerce and Monetary Systems in the Ancient World*, ed. by Robert Rollinger and Christoph Ulf (Melammu Symposia 5), Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2004.

⁴ Both of them paid taxes to *dēkû* officials (no. 12; Joannès and Lemaire 1999 no. 2), and Ahīqam’s father Rapā-Yāma once owed barley which belonged to royal property (*makkūr šarri*, no. 7).

⁵ This is suggested by the Paleo-Hebrew alphabetic signs in no. 10 and perhaps also in Joannès and Lemaire 1999 no. 2.

191). One might be even tempted to suggest that we are here speaking of only one man who used different names in Našar and Āl-Yāhūdu. Even though this theory has some attraction, there is a wealth of evidence that makes it implausible. The business profiles of Ahīqam and Ahīqar are somewhat different, and it is hard to imagine how and why one person would sustain a double identity in two neighbouring villages. Moreover, Ahīqam is once attested in Našar (no. 13), and whereas Nir-Yāma is Ahīqar's only son we know of, Ahīqam had five sons (no. 45), three of whom participated in and continued their father's business.

The reason why groups 1 and 2 were buried together with group 3 could lie in administrative procedures, as hinted at in the present volume (p. 9). Groups 1 and 2 are dead archives, i.e. texts that were sorted out and discarded when they were not important anymore (see p. 8). This most likely happened after the death of Ahīqar and Ahīqam, but if their files were purely private archives, it is highly unlikely that they were deposited together with the Zababa-šar-ušur texts in one locus. The strong presence of the state apparatus in the texts and Ahīqam's and Ahīqar's role in the local operation of the land-for-service sector suggest that these texts may have constituted something else than two private business archives. A case in point is the role of Arad-Gula, a scribe who not only wrote the majority of Ahīqar's documents but was actually a more central figure in the text corpus than Ahīqar himself.⁶ It is thus advisable not to stick too much on the idea of three distinct archives, but we must remain open for the possibility that the documents came into being and were brought together by the interplay of administrative procedures and private business interests. We have to hope that the publication of BaAr 6 will shed more light on this issue.

Babylonian documents rarely refer to the ethnic or geographic origin of individuals, and naming practices are thus our main criterion for identifying people of foreign origin. When written in Babylonian cuneiform, it is very difficult if not impossible to distinguish most of the Hebrew names from the general West Semitic onomasticon, and the use of the divine name Yahweh is widely held as the only distinctive feature in the personal names of Judean origin. The available evidence of Yahwistic names and

their orthographies is substantially increased by the publication of CUSAS 28, and, accordingly, one third of the pages in the volume are devoted to the analysis of personal names and prosopographical index. These will be invaluable tools for everybody working with this material or having an interest in personal names and the linguistic landscape of Babylonia in the mid-first millennium BCE.

In the present corpus, the majority of Yahwistic names appear in the texts written in or related to Āl-Yāhūdu. The number of previously unattested orthographies of the Yahwistic element is substantial in the corpus, but this evidence corroborates what was known before: as the first part of a name, the usual orthography of the Yahwistic element was *ia-(a)-hu-û-*, and as the second element (*-ia)-a-ma* (pp. 14–29). The orthography *ia-(a)-hu-û-* is far more often preceded in cuneiform writing by the divine determinative (pp. 16–18), which indicates that Babylonian scribes recognised it as a divine name more easily than the orthography (*-ia)-a-ma*. These features are not unique to CUSAS 28 but present in the Murašû archive as well.

The extensive discussion of names and naming practices is not, unfortunately, paralleled by a similar in-depth analysis of the other crucial aspects of these texts. Only seven pages are devoted to questions such as archival structures or the social and historical context of the text corpus. The intended readership would have benefited from a longer and more detailed introduction, because most biblical scholars are not experts in Assyriology, let alone in the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods. Without proper contextualisation, the new evidence from Āl-Yāhūdu and its surroundings cannot help biblical scholarship to move beyond the limits of biblical sources in the study of the Judean exile in Babylonia. Publication of the remaining tablets accompanied with an in-depth analysis of the socio-economic context of the texts is a desideratum in the near future.

Some mistakes and inconsistencies have found their way to the first printing, but they are to be corrected in the second printing of the book. For the time being, Pearce has been maintaining a useful list of corrigenda on her webpage at berkeley.academia.edu/LauriePearce.

The documents published in the present volume are of immense importance for the study of Judeans in Babylonia, and we have to thank Laurie E. Pearce and Cornelia Wunsch for their careful work with these texts. The new evidence from Āl-Yāhūdu and its surroundings corroborate the picture emerging from the Murašû archive and show that exile did not equal enslavement, but Judeans had rights, responsibilities, and even opportunities to prosper. From now on, the study of Judean communities in Babylonia is to be primarily based on cuneiform sources, not only on the sporadic pieces of information found in the Hebrew Bible.

⁶ This conclusion is supported by social network analysis of the prosopographical data from the corpus using Ucinet 6 (Stephen P. Borgatti, Martin G. Everett, and Linton C. Freeman, Ucinet 6 for Windows: Software for Social Network Analysis, Harvard: Analytic Technologies, 2002). The normalised Freeman betweenness centrality score for Ahīqam is 26.7, Arad-Gula 18.1, Ahīqar 13.1, Nir-Yāma/Ahīqam 11.8, and Bēl-upehhir/Arad-Gula 9.4. The analysis is based on the published documents from groups 1, 2, and 3.