Judeans in Babylonia : a study of deportees in the Sixth and Fifth Centuries BCE

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8 CONCLUSIONS

In the previous chapters, I have discussed several text groups pertaining to Judeans and Neirabians in Babylonia in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. They concern different geographic and social contexts: King Jehoiachin of Judah and his sons were held hostage in Babylon where some Judean professionals worked as well (chapter 2). A family of Judean royal merchants lived in Sippar, traded with the local temple, and was well-integrated into the Sipparean community of traders (chapter 3). Judean and Neirabian farmers cultivated fields and gardens in the land-for-service sector of the Babylonian rural economy (chapters 4–5, 7). They were granted plots of state land to cultivate and they were required to pay taxes and do work and military service in exchange. These texts reveal notable diversity in the deportees' socio-economic status and level of integration into Babylonian society. The financial means and social networks of the royal merchants were quite different from those of the average Judean farmer, while some farmers were able to benefit from the structures of the land-for-service sector at the expense of their compatriots.

None of the texts explicitly touch upon the reasons which brought Judeans and Neirabians to Babylonia. They are never called prisoners, captives, or deportees. Nevertheless, there seems to be no doubt that the great majority of these people were deportees and their descendants. The presence of Judeans in Babylon is clearly linked to the deportations of the upper class from Jerusalem, and the rural communities of people of foreign origin could not have come into existence without state-organised forced migration and resettlement. The Judean royal merchants and some other Judeans living in cities are the only group which could have arrived in Babylonia voluntarily. Accordingly, even if voluntary migration is a well-attested phenomenon in the ancient Near East, the subjects of the present study are primarily deportees and their descendants.

Throughout this dissertation, naming practices were the primary means of identifying people of non-Babylonian origin. As explained in detail in section 1.4.5, Judeans are identified on the basis of theophoric names containing a Yahwistic element, whereas people with West Semitic Sîn and Nusku names from the village of Neirab are regarded as Neirabians. Logically following from this, the family members of these people are labelled as Judeans or Neirabians as well. The caveat of this method is its inability to identify a large part of the deportees and their descendants. People with common Babylonian or West Semitic names could be descendants of recently arrived immigrants or belong to families which had lived in Babylonia for centuries. Consequently, only those immigrant families which continued to use Yahwistic names, for instance, can be identified, and they come to represent the whole Judean population in Babylonia. The method used in this study can thus identify only people who stuck to certain naming traditions, and it may be that the more conservative and less integrated subset of immigrants dominates the sources which we have identified.

This concluding chapter aims to provide the reader with an overview of some larger themes concerning deportees in Babylonia. Whereas the previous chapters analysed

specific text groups or archives, the present chapter draws from the whole corpus of texts pertaining to Judeans and Neirabians. Many findings related to these two groups are applicable to deportees as a whole, and, accordingly, this chapter often refers to deportees in general instead of Judeans or Neirabians in particular.

8.1 Sources – The Perspective of Babylonian Scribes

The availability of sources for a historical study is not only subject to the preservation of textual and material remains from the past but also to the limits of what sources were actually produced.[1269] Except for clay tablets, there are no material remains which can be linked to deportees living in Babylonia in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE.[1270] When it comes to written sources, it is evident that a wealth of texts was produced in Babylonia during those two hundred years. Even the tiny portion that has come to us consists of tens of thousands of cuneiform documents. However, not everybody produced texts as we do nowadays; a small literate minority was responsible for the whole enterprise.[1271] It is perhaps better to speak of two literate minorities, as texts were written in Akkadian and Aramaic, but literacy in one did not obviously mean literacy in the other. The social contexts in which these languages were written were different: the stronghold of Akkadian was located in the sphere of temples and the urban upper class, whereas Aramaic had an established position in the state administration. Both languages were spoken, but Aramaic was replacing Akkadian as a vernacular. Moreover, if deportees from Syria and the Levant wrote any of these two languages, it was most likely Aramaic. No deportees are attested among the cuneiform scribes who bore Babylonian names and belonged to an exclusive group of urban families. At the same time, some Aramaic scribes (*sēpirus*) of foreign origin are attested, and many deportees came from regions where Aramaic had been spoken and written for centuries.

For the purpose of a historical study, the most decisive difference between Akkadian and Aramaic is the medium of writing. Akkadian was written on clay tablets, while Aramaic was written on perishable materials, and all that is left of Aramaic texts from Babylonia are short captions on a relatively small number of cuneiform tablets. Accordingly, the sources of this thesis are not representative of all literary production in Babylonia, and, what is more important, they were written by members of one rather homogenous group in Babylonian society. This group, commonly referred to in this study as the urban upper class, consisted of families which perpetuated the Akkadian scribal traditions, dwelled in cities, and were closely attached to the temple cult. It is on the basis of the perspective of these people that we perceive immigrants and Babylonian society in general.[1272]

The preserved Akkadian texts primarily originate from temple archives and archives of urban families. Judeans hardly ever appear in temple archives, nor are they attested in most private archives, the protagonists of which belonged to the urban upper class. Nothing similar to the state archives of Assyria has been unearthed, and all that was found during the excavation of royal palaces in Babylon is the so-called Palace Archive

[1269] For a helpful scheme of the process of disappearance and preservation, see Baker 2004, 6.
[1270] Section 1.5.
[1271] Section 1.4.4.
[1272] Section 1.4.4.

of Nebuchadnezzar II (chapter 2). This is presumably explained by the incidental preservation of clay tablets and the importance of Aramaic in the state administration.

Texts pertaining to the land-for-service sector of Babylonian agriculture are a rich source for the study of immigrants, but the agency of deportees in producing these documents should not be overestimated. The Murašû archive was the business archive of a Babylonian family from Nippur, and it is doubtful if the texts from the environs of Yāhūdu actually belonged to Judean private archives, similar to those of urban Babylonian families. As suggested by Waerzeggers, recording economic activity was an efficient means of control, and the scribes in the land-for-service sector were part of the administrative apparatus.[1273]

It has to be emphasised that the voice of deportees themselves can hardly ever be heard in the surviving documentation. The existence of Akkadian texts pertaining to transactions between two Judeans or two Neirabians does not necessarily mean that they decided to use cuneiform instead of Aramaic, as this may have been dictated by administrative or legal necessities. If Judeans or Neirabians themselves produced texts in Babylonia, no material remains of such activity have survived. The eyes through which we perceive deportees are those of Babylonian scribes and the state administration.

8.2 Resettlement and Organisation of Deportees

Unlike Assyrian sources, the extant Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions and letters do not boast about the crowds of captives brought to Babylonia or inform us about the process of moving and resettling them in Babylonia. There is no doubt, however, that deportations did take place, especially in the reigns of Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar II when Babylonia conquered the territories of the former Assyrian Empire. Both accounts in a Babylonian chronicle (*ABC* 5) and the Hebrew Bible attest to the tribute and deportees which Nebuchadnezzar II took from the Levant, and the archaeological excavations in Judah and Ashkelon confirm the picture of destruction and population collapse. Moreover, the existence of numerous twin towns in the Babylonian countryside is difficult to explain in any other way than by interpreting them as settlements of deportees.[1274]

Although the process of deportation cannot be reconstructed in detail, more can be said about the practices of resettling deportees and organising them in administrative structures. The situation in the countryside is the clearest. The twin towns of Yāhūdu and Neirab bear witness to the custom of settling deportees in villages which were named according to the geographic origin of their inhabitants. The state assigned plots of land to deportees, who were required to pay taxes and perform work or military service in exchange. The majority of sources pertaining to Judeans and Neirabians originate from this land-for-service sector of Babylonian agriculture, and it is probable that this not only results from an incidental preservation of sources but reflects actual deportation policies. Babylonia was an agricultural society, and the majority of its population lived and worked in the countryside.[1275] There was an abundance of fertile soil, but the limited availability

[1273] Waerzeggers 2015. See chapters 4 and 5.
[1274] Section 1.2.2.
[1275] On the Babylonian economy in the mid-first millennium BCE, see Stolper 1985; van Driel 1989; 2002; Jursa 2010a.

of water, men, oxen, and tools constrained agricultural produce. This applied especially to central Babylonia, which trailed behind the intensification of agriculture in the north. The Murašû archive originates from this region (chapter 5), and there are reasons to suppose that the villages of Yāhūdu and Našar were located there as well (chapter 4).

Texts pertaining to Judeans also allow us to trace some chronological developments in the land-for-service sector.[1276] The earliest texts from Yāhūdu, written in the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar II and Nabonidus, show that Judeans cultivated state lands, some of which were under the authority of a high officer (*rab mūgi*). The term 'bow land' (*bīt qašti*) is not attested, but a text refers to a 'quiver land' (*bīt azanni*) held by a Judean man. This term is extremely rarely attested, but given its literal meaning, it must have been roughly equivalent to a bow land. A bow land was a parcel of land of varying size, the holder of which had to pay certain taxes and fulfil service obligations. The term implies service as a bowman, but the available sources attest to remarkable difference in the size of bow lands, which must have been somehow reflected in the respective service duties as well. Larger landholdings were called 'horse land' (*bīt sīsê*) and 'chariot land' (*bīt narkabti*)' and their holder was obliged to provide the state with a horseman or war chariot.

No visible changes took place in the beginning of the Persian period, but texts from the reign of Darius I show clear terminological differences. Judeans now hold bow lands and their dependent status is emphasised by the title *šušānu*. *Šušānu*s belonged to the class of the semi-free population in Babylonia: they were not chattel slaves, but the state and its representatives could control them and exploit their labour quite extensively. Moreover, landholders are now organised in units of ten and they are represented by one of their peers. This structure resembles *eširtu*s, or units of ten, which are attested in Babylonian cities and temples, and which were responsible for tax payments and work or military service. Judean holders of *bīt ritti*s – a kind of institutional landholding as well – are attested for the first time in the reign of Darius I, but this term was not a Persian innovation but found already in the Neo-Babylonian period. Finally, texts from the reign of Darius I introduce the governor of Across-the-River as the highest authority over Judean landholders, but the official called *rab mūgi* does not feature in the texts any more.

The texts from the Murašû archive from the late fifth century pertain to Judean holders of *bīt ritti*s, bow lands, and horse lands, often as partners of people with non-Yahwistic names. The most important novelty in the Murašû archive is the *haṭru*, an administrative unit in which holders of state lands were grouped together. The names of *haṭru*s often pertain to ethnic or professional groups. However, these names did not always designate the status of landholders but rather the status of the beneficiaries of the *haṭru.* Judeans, for instance, were primarily organised in *haṭru*s of *sēpiru*s, which were named after high-ranking officials in charge of the units. Thus, the names do not indicate that the Judean landholders were *sēpiru*s themselves. Taxation terminology appears to be more standardised in the Murašû archive, and the annual tax obligation is usually represented as the whole *ilku*, the king's man (*ṣāb šarri*), flour (*qēmu*), *bāru*, and any other presents to the house of the king (*mimma nadānātu ša bīt šarri*). The evidence from the environs of Yāhūdu is more random, and some texts refer to *ilku*, some to *ṣāb šarri*, and others to rental payments (*sūtu* and *imittu*) to the crown.

[1276] On the land-for-service sector, see chapters 4 and 5.

Although the texts from the environs of Yāhūdu and from the Murašû archive cover a period of 150 years and contain terminological differences, it is difficult to know which changes reflect historical processes and which are just a result of the incidental nature of the documentation. As bow lands are attested in other sources already in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II, they were not a novelty introduced by Darius I. Moreover, the existence of Yāhūdu in the mid-sixth century and the large number of twin towns in the late fifth century suggest that the deportees were organised from the very beginning in communities according to their geographic origin, and this custom did not change over time. The ten-man units of farmers and fields of Judean *šušānu*s in Yāhūdu and the *haṭru* system in the Murašû archive attest to the same phenomenon. Terminology and organisational structures evidently developed over time, but the land-for-service sector remained essentially the same. The basic outcomes of this system did not radically change either: texts from the environs of Yāhūdu and from the Murašû archive pertain to tax payments, concrete work or military service, and payments made to hire substitutes to perform the service obligations. Details of this system are difficult to reconstruct, because both text groups show that the preservation of pertinent evidence was often incidental. The evidence of *ṣāb šarri* payments in the environs of Yāhūdu is the result of the unrest surrounding the accession of Darius I, and the concrete nature of military service in the Murašû archive is confirmed only by a single text group from the second year of Darius II.

Two well-known features of the Assyrian deportation policy are the holding of royal hostages at the imperial capital and the assignment of foreign craftsmen and elite troops to building projects and the army. Babylonian evidence of these practices comes primarily from the Palace Archive of Nebuchadnezzar II which attests to the presence of foreign royalty, soldiers, and craftsmen in Babylon (chapter 2). The presence of King Jehoiachin, his retinue, and some Judean officials in Babylon corroborate the account in 2 Kings 24 of the deportation of upper classes from Jerusalem. Apart from a Judean gardener, Judean craftsmen and soldiers are not attested in the archive.

It appears that Babylonian kings donated deportees to temples or assigned them as corvée labour to public building projects only to a small extent.[1277] There is some evidence of both practices, but deportees did not play a key role in the temple economy and hired labour was largely used in building projects.[1278] Given the huge size of the preserved temple archives, this is hardly incidental, and it is likely that the state primarily kept deportees under its own control and did not donate them to temples in large numbers. The main destination for deportees was the land-for-service sector in the countryside. It met the needs of the state by increasing agricultural output and providing the state with taxes, soldiers, and labour.

Voluntary migration undoubtedly took place in the sixth and fifth centuries as well, and the presence of Iranians and Arabs in Babylonia attest to this phenomenon. However, when it comes to Judeans and other recent arrivals from Syria and the Levant, it is likely that only a tiny portion of them were not deported to Babylonia. It is hard to imagine that

[1277] Nabonidus' stela from Babylon refers to the donation of prisoners of war to temples as corvée labour (Schaudig 2001, 521 ix:31'–41'; Beaulieu 2005, 58), and Egyptian temple dependants (*širku*s) are well attested at the Ebabbar temple (Hackl and Jursa 2015, 158–160).
[1278] On hired labour in public projects, see Jursa 2010a, 661–681.

the population of twin towns, foreign royalty and professionals in Babylon, and foreign temple dependants (*širku*s) had arrived in Babylonia of their free will. Merchants offer the only example of Judeans whose migration to Babylonia could well have been voluntary. Long-distance trade connected the Eastern Mediterranean to Babylonia, and it cannot be excluded that some foreign merchants travelled to Babylonia for the purpose of trade and eventually settled there. Nevertheless, it is perhaps no coincidence that many foreign traders worked as royal merchants and were thus somehow part of the state apparatus. There is no evidence to corroborate this suggestion, but one needs to remain open to the possibility that deported merchants were attached to the state in the same manner as craftsmen or professional soldiers.

8.3 Social and Economic Aspects of Life in Babylonia

The majority of deportees were settled in the countryside, and most – if not all of them – were attached to the land-for-service sector. Large numbers of deportees were settled in underdeveloped rural areas in central Babylonia, and they were given plots of land to cultivate. The plots could not be sold, and their holder was responsible for paying taxes and performing service obligations incumbent on the landholding.

Although the terminology concerning the land-for-service sector developed over time, there was no parallel process of standardisation. Landholdings were described as bow, horse, and chariot lands according to the type of troops they were obliged to outfit for royal service. At the same time, a bow land could refer to a small plot cultivated by a family or to a huge holding which had to be cultivated by dozens – if not hundreds – of farmers. Therefore it is likely that a bow land was not always expected to equip only a single bowman but sometimes several bowmen, according to its size. The burden of tax and service obligations also varied in relation to political circumstances. Landholdings in the land-for-service sector were only sometimes under the direct control of the king and his estates, and usually they were at the disposal of royalty and high officials of the state. These men of high status were able to use the resources for their own benefit, and the struggles for the Persian throne after the death of Cambyses and Artaxerxes I are reflected in the texts from the environs of Yāhūdu and in the Murašû archive, respectively.[1279]

Judeans held bow lands in the environs of Yāhūdu and in the Nippur countryside, and a Judean family is attested as holders of a horse land in the Murašû archive. Several Judeans also held properties called *bīt ritti*, the exact nature of which still escapes us. In any case, it is quite clear that the term describes properties which were not the private property of their holders. No Judean holders of chariot lands are attested. In the environs of Yāhūdu, Judean landholders and their landholdings were organised together as an ethnic unit: Judeans lived in the village of Judah, documents refer to the fields of Judean *šušānu*s in a collective tone, and Judean landholders were organised in units of ten. The term 'Judean' is not used in the Murašû archive, but the practice of organising landholders according to their ethnic or geographic origin is well attested in the archive. Judeans primarily belonged to the *haṭru*s of *sēpiru*s, and they appear as inhabitants of certain villages. At the same time, the co-holders of a bow land often bore very diverse names,

[1279] Chapters 4 and 5.

and it is likely that Judeans shared their responsibilities with people of non-Judean origin as well.

The communal aspect of living and landholding in the countryside is not only reflected in the administrative organisation of farmers, as landholdings and the pertinent obligations were often shared between several families. Villagers could join their forces to secure a stronger position vis-à-vis businessmen in the land-for-service sector and thus improve their economic condition. This aspect is often obscured by the extant documentation, which usually refers to a couple of landholders only, but a closer study reveals that the named people were often representatives of a larger group of local farmers.[1280]

Landholders in the land-for-service sector were a semi-free population. They cannot be described as slaves, but not as free peasants either. They did not own the land they held and thus could not sell it, although the plots were transferred as inheritance from one generation to the other. The landholder was responsible for paying taxes and providing the state or its representatives with work and military service. Sources from the Persian period often use the word *šušānu* to describe landholders in this context, but it remains unclear if the term practically covered all subjects of the land-for-service sector or if it had a more specific meaning. Despite the obligations incumbent on them, the landholders had considerable freedom to move about in Babylonia, lease out their plots, or hire substitutes to perform service obligations. This allowed landholders to outsource to others the responsibilities related to their plots and to find alternative ways of earning income in the countryside. Some of them had careers as businessmen and they could profit from the structures of the land-for-service sector. Some of these people bought rights to collect rental payments on behalf of the state, while others provided credit to less fortunate landholders. These operations were often accompanied by beer brewing and trade in staples, which brought rural businessmen to cities to sell their produce. Successful businessmen could benefit from the financial difficulties of their fellow landholders, which created inequality within the rural communities. In the same vein, there was disparity between the holders of small plots and families with more extensive landholdings.

Some landholders in the land-for-service sector also owned private land, but there is, for instance, no evidence of free Judean peasants who only cultivated their own lands. Chattel slaves did not play any important role in agriculture, but some landholders and agricultural businessmen had slaves who served the family at home or ran a brewery or tavern in the city. Some Judeans had slaves of presumably Egyptian origin, and there is one example of a Judean family who owned a slave with a Yahwistic name. If the slaves were not renamed by their current or former masters and if they actually originated from Egypt and Judah, these cases attest to significant social stratification within rural deportee communities.[1281] The deportees called slaves of high officials or royalty are better seen as minor officials. Deportees also fished and herded animals, but the sources are scarce and it is unknown how common this was.

The available sources from cities are fewer but more diverse than those from the countryside. If the state archives of Babylonia had been preserved to the same extent as

[1280] See section 5.2.

[1281] On Judean slaves and slave ownership in Babylonia, see Magdalene and Wunsch 2011.

their Assyrian counterparts, the number of attested foreign soldiers, craftsmen, and workers would probably be significantly larger, at least in Babylon. This is suggested by the fact that the only extant part of the administrative archives from Babylon attest to the presence of numerous professionals of foreign origin in the capital. As noted above, private archives from cities are generally a fruitless source for the study of immigrants, as the archive-holding families primarily interacted with a closed circle of friends and colleagues.

The presence of King Jehoiachin of Judah, his five sons, two Ashkelonite princes, and perhaps some members of Lydian royalty in Babylon in the 590s testify to deportations of upper classes from the Eastern Mediterranean (chapter 2). The Judeans were held hostage in order to prevent rebellions in Judah, but this did not stop Zedekiah from rising against his Babylonian overlords. As the preserved tablets were written already before Zedekiah's rebellion, it remains unclear if his actions had any consequences for his relatives in Babylon. In any case, the conditions of royal hostages were closer to house arrest than imprisonment, and the large oil rations to Jehoiachin suggest that his royal status was reflected in the way he was treated. If his five sons were not already born in Jerusalem, he was apparently able to live with his family and even produce heirs in captivity. The account of 2 Kings 25:27–30 on the amnesty of Jehoiachin hardly fits this evidence, such that it is better seen as a literary creation and hopeful ending to the biblical book.[1282]

Foreign soldiers and craftsmen from the border regions of the empire were also deported to Babylon and maintained by the royal administration. The troops guarded important locations in the capital, and craftsmen, such as boatbuilders, practised their profession for the benefit of the empire. Given their value for the state, it appears that foreign professionals were treated well, although they were dependent on the palace and obviously could not leave the city freely. If they were allowed to marry and reproduce, it is unknown if their children were still regarded as dependants of the palace. The communities in the countryside lived under the same conditions for generations, but not all children of a soldier were fit for their father's profession.

Because literacy in Akkadian was by no means a prerequisite for working in the royal administration, some educated deportees were assigned to offices of lower and higher rank. Judeans are primarily attested as minor officials in the land-for-service sector, and as such they were responsible for collecting taxes, organising work and military service, and ensuring the efficient cultivation of royal lands. Judeans found their way into more important positions in exceptional cases only, and the Judean courtiers (*ša rēš šarri*) in Babylon in the 590s were obviously former members of the court in Jerusalem. A Judean *sēpiru* served the governor of Across-the-River in the early Persian period, but the background of this rare case cannot be reconstructed from the single reference to his name in a single document.[1283] Egyptians and people with West Semitic names are frequently attested in high offices, but their non-Babylonian names do not suggest that they were deportees. West Semitic names in Babylonia are not indicative of foreign origin in the mid-first millennium, and it is uncertain that all Egyptians had arrived in Babylonia as deportees.

[1282] Section 2.5.

[1283] See section 6.1.

Very few Judeans were integrated into urban communities to the extent that their social networks also included people from Babylonian families. The royal merchants in Sippar examined in this study were a rare example of such people, as they were members of the local mercantile community and even gave their daughter in marriage to a Babylonian man with a family name (chapter 3). The community of traders in Sippar was multicultural, and Judeans and other people of foreign origin worked there together with indigenous Babylonians. Nevertheless, this community was distinct from the priestly community of Sippar, and although the Judeans met temple personnel when they traded with the temple, their personal networks did not reach the priestly circles. The relatively small dowry paid to the family of the Babylonian groom indicates that it was attractive to marry into the Judean family: this can be explained by their rather high status as royal merchants and perhaps by their business networks as well. The case of this single Judean family is representative of the situation in cities as a whole. Deportees and other foreigners are found in the spheres of trade, crafts, and the administration, but not in the circles of Babylonian families who held priestly offices and ran the temples.

The presence of deportees in cities does not necessarily mean that they all lived there. People from the countryside are regularly attested as witnesses in the Murašû documents drafted in Nippur. Some of these people are also attested as principals in other documents, which shows that they were usually landholders in the land-for-service sector. They had to come to Nippur to deal with officials or the Murašû family, and once they had come there, they were occasionally asked to witness some documents. Brewing, keeping a tavern, and the retail of agricultural produce also brought deportees from rural communities to cities.

Deportees were not controlled by means of enslavement, but their dependence on the state was secured by other means. Integration of deportees into the land-for-service sector and the centralised maintenance of foreign professionals in Babylon brought them under close supervision by the state. Some non-professional corvée labour in large projects was probably controlled in the same way, but the available sources suggest that this was not a major occupation of deportees. Babylonian kings donated some deportees to temples, which gave a newcomer the status of *širku* ('temple dependant'), but this was the fate of a relatively small number of deportees.

The protagonists of the available sources primarily belong to the better-offs among the deportees in Babylonia. People like Ahīqam and Ahīqar from the environs of Yāhūdu, King Jehoiachin in Babylon, and Judean royal merchants in Sippar are not typical examples of Judean deportees. A small farmer in the land-for-service sector was the average deportee in Babylonia in the mid-first millennium. The majority of the population in Babylonia lived on or below the subsistence level,[1284] and the income of these landholders was not any higher. In addition to providing for their family, landholders had to take care of tax payments and service obligations or substitute payments in silver. These obligations occasionally exceeded the income of their plot, and landholders were forced to assume a loan to make ends meet. This often led to serious financial problems if the debtor had to pledge his landholding to secure the debt, and, consequently, he could become a lessee of his own plot. The life of a farmer was probably not any harder in

[1284] Jursa 2010a, 762–764.

Babylonia than in Judah or Neirab, but given the elevated social background of many deportees, their new socio-economic status in Babylonia may have felt miserable.

8.4 Women

Men dominate the Neo-Babylonian textual records, and this also applies to the documents pertaining to deportees and their descendants. Although women could engage in the same types of legal contracts and economic transactions as men did,[1285] they remain in the margins of the documentary sources of the patriarchal society. This section surveys the role and status of women in Judean and Neirabian deportee communities in Babylonia.

The Assyrian Empire deported women and children in addition to men, and the Babylonians continued this practice. 2 Kings 24:15 refers to the deportation of the king's mother and wives from Jerusalem, and the evidence from Nebuchadnezzar II's Palace Archive suggests that King Jehoiachin was able to live with his family in Babylon. More importantly, the creation of permanent twin towns in the Babylonian countryside was only possible if both men and women were settled there. Quite surprisingly, no Judean women are attested in the Murašû archive, but several women – some of them of Judean origin – feature in the texts from Yāhūdu and its surroundings. In the texts from Neirab, only a single document – a marriage agreement – pertains to women (chapter 7).

In the documents from Yāhūdu and its surroundings, women are usually attested together or in relation to their husbands, brothers, or sons (chapter 4). Women guaranteed their husbands' debts and concluded transactions on their behalf. Moreover, wives and mothers are attested as debtors together with their husbands and sons, and some married couples participated in *harrānu* business ventures together. Despite the usual co-occurrence of women and their male relatives in the extant documentation, women occasionally concluded transactions completely on their own. They could grant credit and own, buy, and sell movable property, such as animals and slaves. This evidence implies that women not only participated in economic activities at home but could also assume an active role outside. However, this becomes explicit only in exceptional cases, such as when their male relative was not available or the other party of the transaction required an additional guarantee for the fulfilment of the obligation. The two extant marriage agreements from Judean communities support this view: brides of foreign origin were given in marriage by their brothers and mothers in the absence of their fathers.

Not all deported women shared the semi-free social status of the people in the land-for-service sector, as some of them were enslaved and others attached to temple households. Judean slave women are not attested, but some wealthier Judeans owned slave women of foreign origin. This seems to indicate that certain less fortunate deportees ended up serving other deportees in Babylonia. Although temples were not among the main destinations of deportees, a couple of Judean women were dependants of the Ebabbar temple in Sippar.

Deportees not only married within their own community. A Judean woman from a family of royal merchants even married into a Babylonian family from the urban upper

[1285] Wunsch 2003b.

class.[1286] This was exceptional, however, and most deportees found spouses among other deportees and local lower classes. Marriages involving deportees were at least occasionally recorded on clay tablets, according to the Babylonian practice, but it remains unclear if such documents were also written in Aramaic on perishable materials.[1287] Nothing suggests that there was a legal obligation to write a document in Akkadian before the marriage was valid,[1288] nor was there a specific social context to which the marriage agreements belong. They are attested in urban and rural contexts, and, in the most peculiar example, two families with Egyptian names concluded a Babylonian-style marriage agreement in Susa.[1289]

When it comes to the wife's status in marriage, some differences can be observed despite the general homogeneity of Babylonian marriage agreements in the sixth century. First, all marriage agreements pertaining to brides without a family name include the so-called 'iron dagger' clause: if the wife was caught with another man, she would die by the (iron) dagger. This applied to all marriages involving deportees as well. On the contrary, the clause is absent from marriages which involved a bride from the urban upper class. Adulterous wives were undoubtedly punished in upper-class families as well, but the social norms which guided behaviour in the upper social stratum were apparently different from those prevailing in the lower strata.[1290] Second, families of non-Babylonian origin could influence the wording and stipulations of marriage agreements, even though they were written by Babylonian scribes.[1291] An interesting example is a marriage agreement between two Egyptian families, which explicitly allows the bride to get a divorce from her husband. Normally only the husband was able to do this, and such a stipulation is not attested in any other extant marriage agreement from Babylonia.[1292]

The small number of documents pertaining to Judean and Neirabian women conforms to the picture emerging from the contemporary Babylonian sources. Men dominated the public space, and they are typically attested as the protagonists, witnesses, and scribes of the documents. However, women are attested in various contexts and text types, and they could assume an active role especially when their husband was absent or deceased. When the male head of the family was not present, his wife could give their daughter in marriage or pay taxes and debts on behalf of her husband. Women could also own and manage valuable property of their own, such as slaves and cattle. However, because women did not have a share in their fathers' inheritance and the dowry was not at their disposal, their economic independence was severely restricted and most of them were ultimately dependent on their father or husband.[1293]

[1286] Marriage agreements from Judean and Neirabian communities are discussed in sections 3.3, 4.3.6.2, and 7.2.4.
[1287] Such Aramaic documents are attested in the Elephantine and Babatha archives. See Lemos 2010, 62–80. On Babylonian marriage agreements, see Roth 1989; on marriage agreements pertaining to people of foreign origin, see Abraham 2005/2006; 2015.
[1288] Roth 1989, 28.
[1289] BMA 34. See also marriage agreements BMA 35 and Joannès 1990 no. 1, as well as the discussion in Abraham 2015, 41–44.
[1290] Waerzeggers 2016.
[1291] Abraham 2015.
[1292] BMA 34. See Roth 1989, 14–15.
[1293] Wunsch 2003b.

8.5 Religion

Ancient religion is often perceived through the lens of temple worship and state-sponsored cults. This results from the fact that private worship and household religion are far less often touched upon in the available sources. This applies both to the Levant and Mesopotamia: monumental temples are among the most notable archaeological discoveries, and a wealth of written sources describe different aspects of state-sponsored cults. When it comes to deportees' religion in Babylonia, textual sources are few, and no material evidence exists. This section is an attempt to sketch some rough outlines about this aspect.

The destruction of Jerusalem and its temple and the deportations to Babylonia have rightfully been seen as transformative events in ancient Judean religion.[1294] It has been suggested that many religious practices, such as Sabbath observance, developed, gained new importance, or were reshaped among the Judeans in Babylonia as response to these changed circumstances.[1295] However, one should not be guided by the idea (Deut 12) that the Yahwistic sacrificial cult was only possible in the temple of Jerusalem[1296] and that altars or temples dedicated to Yahweh could not exist in Babylonia. The evidence of Yahwistic temples in Elephantine and Leontopolis, for instance, attests to the existence of other cultic centres which were contemporaneous with the second temple in Jerusalem.[1297] In light of this evidence, there seems to be no internal religious reasons which would have prevented Judeans from constructing a temple or a small shrine in Babylonia as well.[1298] Indeed, the mention of 'Casiphia the place' in Ezra 8:15–20 has been interpreted as a reference to a Yahwistic temple in Babylonia.[1299]

Cuneiform texts or archaeological sources do not attest to a temple of Isis, Baal, or Yahweh in Babylonia, but the absence of a monumental building does not mean that such sacrificial cults did not exist. A small altar in the midst of a village or in the courtyard of an urban dwelling would have sufficed,[1300] but material remains of such cultic places may never be identified in an archaeological survey or excavation. If there had been resources to build a temple for a West Semitic, Egyptian, or Judean deity, the local population hardly had any ideological or political reasons to oppose the undertaking. The absence of any traces of Egyptian shrines is especially noteworthy, because many Egyptians had a high social status in Babylonia and presumably the economic means to build places of worship in Babylonian cities. An interesting – although somewhat different – point of comparison is the temple of Assur in Uruk in the sixth century.[1301] A community of Assyrian origin ran the temple, and it is possible that they had arrived and established the

[1294] Albertz 1994, 369–436; 2003, 132–138; Becking and Korpel (eds.) 1999; Middlemas 2005; 2007.
[1295] Grünwaldt 1992, 1, 222–228 (with references to older literature); Albertz 1994, 407–411.
[1296] On Deuteronomy and cultic centralisation in Judah, see Reuter 1993; Knowles 2006; Kratz et al. (eds.) 2010.
[1297] See Runesson et al. 2008, 274–294.
[1298] See Chong 1996.
[1299] See Runesson et al. 2008, 274–275; Blenkinsopp 2009, 60 + n. 34.
[1300] As proposed by Martti Nissinen (personal communication).
[1301] Beaulieu 1997.

shrine in Uruk only after the fall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.[1302] If this was the case, the temple of Assur is an important example of a cultic centre of an immigrant community in Babylonia. Continuation of the worship of Sîn among the Neirabian community in Babylonia is suggested by a clay tablet (Dhorme 1928 no. 26) referring to some property of Sîn of Neirab in a severely damaged context.[1303]

Observance of the Sabbath or religious festivals described in the Hebrew Bible is not mentioned in any surviving documents from Babylonia. This is quite contrary to the Elephantine texts, which refer both to the Sabbath and Passover.[1304] Some Judeans in Babylonia bore the name Šabbatāya, which may imply the importance of the seventh day of the week, but it cannot be confirmed that the name was exclusively Judean or referred to observance of the Sabbath in particular.[1305] Ran Zadok has proposed that Judeans rarely – if at all – concluded or witnessed transactions on the Sabbath or during Judean religious festivals,[1306] but this suggestion is impossible to evaluate. The congruence of Babylonian and Judean calendars remains unclear, and there is no way of knowing how weeks and their seventh days should be counted. It is even uncertain what religious festivals Judeans observed and when, as the evidence from Elephantine emphasises the diversity of Judean religious practices in the late fifth century.[1307] The same difficulties apply to the nature and timing of the Sabbath in the sixth and fifth centuries.

Judeans did not refuse to use seals which included non-Yahwistic divine imagery: the divine symbols or images of Marduk, Ištar, Sîn, and Ahura Mazda are attested on seals owned by Judeans.[1308] Moreover, marriage agreements pertaining to Judeans and other people of foreign origin summon the Babylonian deities Marduk, Zarpanītu, and Nabû to punish the violator of the agreement, but no foreign deities are ever attested among them. These examples show that the worship of Yahweh was compatible with the worship of Babylonian deities, and any claims about exclusive reverence of Yahweh are unfounded. At the same time, one has to emphasise that Yahweh was of special importance to a notable group of Judean deportees and their descendants. As the following discussion shows, both Yahwistic and non-Yahwistic theophoric names were rarely used in a single Judean family.

In addition to being the primary means of identification, naming practices remain the most important source for the study of deportees' religious practices in Babylonia. A theophoric name does not naturally mean that its bearer was a devoted worshipper of the deity in question, but it suggests that the bearer's parents had a reason to choose this specific name from among all the other available options. Family and cultural traditions, the socio-economic status of the parents, and even trends undoubtedly influenced the choice, but theophoric names were hardly devoid of religious significance. As the literal

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[1302] Radner 2017; but cf. Beaulieu 1997, 61–62, who argues that the community and its temple originated already in the seventh century.
[1303] See Dhorme 1928, 67; Tolini 2015, 70 n. 49; 91 n. 96.
[1304] On Judean religious practices at Elephantine, see, most recently, Kratz 2015, 137–147; Granerød 2016, 128–208.
[1305] See section 1.4.5.2.
[1306] Zadok 1979a, 81–82; 2014a, 117.
[1307] Kratz 2015; Granerød 2016, 128–208 with further literature.
[1308] See section 5.7. Cf. Zadok 2014a, 117, who argues that Judeans did not use 'pagan' imagery on their seals.

meaning of a Hebrew theophoric name was presumably understandable for a native speaker of Hebrew, its devotional aspects were much more apparent than those of its modern counterparts, such as John or Michael. Accordingly, we may surmise that families which used theophoric names with Isis, Baal, or Yahweh revered the respective deities.

As a logical result of the methodology employed, the majority of identified Judeans bear Yahwistic names. A more nuanced picture emerges from the analysis of the two large text corpora from the countryside, namely, the documents from the environs of Yāhūdu and the Murašû archive. Yahwistic names are generally dominant, but there are striking generational differences. First, there are always less Yahwistic names among Judean patronymics than Judean first names. In the documents from Yāhūdu and its surroundings (572–477), 67% of Judean fathers and 81% of their children have Yahwistic names. The figures for the Murašû archive (452–413) are 45% and 66%, respectively. Even if the documents from the environs of Yāhūdu are assigned to three subsets (33 Nbk – 17 Nbn; 1 Cyr – 16 Dar; 17 Dar – 9 Xer), children always have Yahwistic names more often than their fathers.[1309] Second, Judeans from the environs of Yāhūdu rarely used Akkadian names (fathers 7%, children 5%) or non-Yahwistic theophoric names (fathers 4%, children 3%). However, a generational difference is obvious in the Murašû archive: 21% of Judean fathers have Akkadian names and 17% non-Yahwistic theophoric names. For their children, the frequency in both categories is only 3%. Table 8.1 summarises the data from the environs of Yāhūdu in 572–477, from the environs of Yāhūdu during the peak activity of Ahīqar and Ahīqam in 538–506 (1 Cyr – 16 Dar), and from the Murašû archive in 452–413.

Table 8.1 Judean naming practices[1310]

	Environs of Yāhūdu				Environs of Yāhūdu 1 Cyr–16 Dar				Murašû archive			
	Patronymics		First names		Patronymics		First names		Patronymics		First names	
Names borne by Judeans	118		155		78		110		42		61	
Yahwistic	79	67%	126	81%	56	72%	89	81%	19	45%	40	66%
West Semitic non-Yahwistic	21	18%	19	12%	12	15%	13	12%	10	24%	15	25%
Akkadian	8	7%	8	5%	5	6%	7	6%	9	21%	2	3%
Non-Yahwistic theophoric	5	4%	4	3%	3	4%	3	3%	7	17%	2	3%

The interpretation of these figures causes serious difficulties. In his study of Judean naming practices in the Murašû archive, E. J. Bickerman suggests that the dramatic change in Judean naming practices during the fifth century was a consequence of the 'YHWH-alone' movement in Babylonia, which also sparked the missions of Ezra and Nehemiah.[1311] A religious revival among the Judeans in exile would explain the dramatic

[1309] 33 Nbk – 17 Nbn (34 years): 47% of fathers and 90% of their children had Yahwistic names; 1 Cyr – 16 Dar (33 years): 72% of fathers and 81% of their children had Yahwistic names; 17 Dar – 9 Xer (29 years): 69% of fathers and 82% of their children had Yahwistic names.

[1310] The category of non-Yahwistic theophoric names overlaps with the categories of Akkadian and West Semitic non-Yahwistic names. The first category comprises all non-Yahwistic theophoric names, including the theophoric names attested in the second and third categories.

[1311] Bickerman 1978.

decrease in the use of Akkadian and non-Yahwistic theophoric names and the simultaneous increase in the use of Yahwistic names. However, such a religious revival seems to have taken place in every generation in the environs of Yāhūdu as well, because Judean fathers consistently bore Yahwistic names less often than their children. This problem is emphasised by the comparison of the three chronological subgroups of texts from Yāhūdu and its surroundings. If the figures reflect the naming practices as they were, one would suppose that the children of the previous subgroup would have roughly the same percentage of Yahwistic names as the fathers of the following subgroup. This is not the case, and the difference between the early and middle groups is 18 percentage points, and between the middle and late groups it is 12 percentage points.

It must be concluded that the available data on naming practices is somehow skewed, as it constantly inflates the number of Yahwistic names as first names and/or undervalues the number of Yahwistic names as patronymics. The reason for this corruption remains unclear, and, for now, one must refrain from drawing any conclusions from this generational pattern. When it comes to the differences between the surroundings of Yāhūdu and the Murašû archive, we may carefully suggest that there was some decrease in the use of Yahwistic names from the sixth to the fifth century. Alternatively, this may also be indicative of different naming practices in Judean communities, and the situation in the environs of Yāhūdu may not be representative of the situation in the countryside of Nippur in the same period.

It is noteworthy that a very small percentage of attested Judeans in the environs of Yāhūdu bore non-Yahwistic theophoric names. This can lead to two different conclusions. First, Judean families did not generally use non-Yahwistic theophoric names in the region. Second, families strongly stuck to certain naming traditions, and some Judean families did not use Yahwistic names at all, while others favoured Yahwistic names and almost never gave non-Yahwistic theophoric names to their children. The second option presupposes that Yahwistic names did not dominate Judean naming traditions in Judah either, and people also favoured theophoric names referring to El, Baal, Bīt-il, or other deities. This idea finds some support in the onomasticon of Yāhūdu and its surroundings, which includes some names with Bīt-il or Il/El as their theophoric element. The co-occurrence of Yahweh and Bīt-il in theophoric names is reminiscent of the situation at Elephantine,[1312] but it must be emphasised that the Bīt-il and Il/El names are relatively rare in the environs of Yāhūdu. Yahweh is the most often attested deity in the West Semitic names of the corpus, which suggests that most Judean families favoured Yahwistic names.

It seems that despite contacts with Babylonians and visits to bigger cities, the Judean community in Yāhūdu and its surroundings stuck to traditional Yahwistic names and adopted only a few Akkadian and non-Yahwistic theophoric names. This practice can be contrasted to the contemporary naming practices of Judean royal merchants in Sippar. The older generation of the mercantile family had both Judean and Babylonian names, but their children bore only Akkadian, mostly theophoric names. This was probably due to their everyday interaction with the local population, manifested in their social networks and in the marriage of their daughter into an established Babylonian family. A relatively high social status and intimate ties to the local population distinguished them from their

[1312] See, most recently, van der Toorn 2016b.

compatriots in Yāhūdu, and this also explains the observable differences in naming practices.[1313]

As I argued above, theophoric names were hardly devoid of religious significance and they must have somehow reflected the wishes of parents who chose to give a certain name to their child. The theophoric sentence names had a meaning, and giving thanks to a certain deity or asking a certain god to protect the baby could not have been completely arbitrary. Although exact figures cannot be given and the data appears to be somewhat skewed, some Judeans definitely continued to use Yahwistic names in Babylonia from the sixth until the late fifth century. As it seems improbable that the use of Yahwistic names was only a cultural tradition, we may conclude that the worship of Yahweh continued in some form among the exiled Judean community.

Even if a Yahwistic name probably indicates that a person's parents felt some affinity for Yahweh, it remains uncertain which other deities the parents worshipped or which deities the person worshipped himself. Several different deities in addition to Yahweh were worshipped in the kingdom of Judah, and the religious plurality of Babylonian society was nothing new to Judean deportees. It is thus expected that deportees from Judah had no reason to refrain from worshipping deities other than Yahweh. The use of both Babylonian and Yahwistic theophoric names in some families supports this view, although it has to be noted that the number of such cases is relatively small. An exceptional case is the use of the names Bēl-šar-uṣur and Yāhû-šar-uṣur by one and the same person in Yāhūdu.[1314] The use of a double name is more likely than a name change in this case, and it might have been motivated by the bearer's connections to the royal administration. The double name may indicate that its bearer worshipped both Bēl (Marduk) and Yahweh or equated the two deities, but the ambiguity of the name Bēl ('lord') could also allow some play with the meaning of the name.

8.6 Culture and Integration

The continued use of Yahwistic names – and presumably the continued worship of Yahweh – in Babylonia from the sixth until the late fifth century indicates that some descendants of Judean deportees shared an identity which was somewhat different from that of the surrounding culture. At the same time, these Judeans did not live in isolation; they were in regular interaction with Babylonian and Persian officials and entrepreneurs in the land-for-service sector. These observations apply to Neirabians in the sixth century as well. This section is aimed at discussing different aspects of identity and questions about integration into Babylonian society.

The Babylonian practice of settling deportees in rural communities according to their geographic origin undoubtedly had consequences for integration and the preservation of identity. The sources from Yāhūdu emphasise the Judean character of this village, and they confirm that the names of twin towns really had a descriptive function. The West Semitic names featuring the deities Sîn and Nusku in Neirab point towards the same conclusion. There is some evidence that ethnic enclaves existed in cities as well.

[1313] This discussion has benefitted from the conversations with Reinhard Kratz and other participants in the conference 'Die Religionspolitik der Achaimeniden und die Rolle der Lokalheiligtümer', held in Münster in February 2016.

[1314] C2–4. See section 4.4.

The Palace Archive of Nebuchadnezzar II refers to ethnically homogenous groups of foreign soldiers and craftsmen who received rations from the royal administration.

The very existence of cuneiform documents from the Babylonian twin towns confirms that the population of Yāhūdu or Neirab was not isolated from the rest of society. The aims of the land-for-service sector necessitated control and the supervision of landholders. Officials were in charge of collecting taxes and channelling men to work projects and military service, but even everyday business transactions in the villages appear to have been controlled by Babylonian scribes. The seeming omnipresence of the scribe Arad-Gula in the village of Našar and his peculiar role as the hinge between the dossiers of two Judean businessmen is the clearest example of this phenomenon. Moreover, it has to be emphasised that even if the majority of original inhabitants in a twin town shared a common geographic origin, the population was not – and did not remain – homogenous. The early documents from Yāhūdu do not conform to the idea of an exclusively Judean population. For instance, there appears to have been significant Judean habitation in the village of Ashkelon near Nippur in the late fifth century.

The movement of people between different villages and between the countryside and cities does not support the idea of isolated rural communities either. The protagonists of the texts from the environs of Yāhūdu are attested in several villages and in Babylon, the inhabitants of Neirab appear in Hīt and Babylon, and landholders from rural villages frequently visited the city of Nippur. Nothing suggests that the local and regional movement of deportees was restricted, and this allowed them to be in touch with people outside their immediate surroundings.

Although there was movement and interaction, not all deportees had the same level of contact with other population groups. Socio-economic diversity among the deportees also affected their possibilities to interact and integrate. Accordingly, royal merchants, businessmen like Ahīqam, and small indebted farmers did not share the same means and interests to integrate into the surrounding society. Royal merchants worked for the state one way or the other, they traded with Babylonian temples, and their social circles consisted of merchants of both Babylonian and foreign origin. My study of the social networks of the Judean royal merchants in chapter 3 revealed that they were deeply integrated into the mercantile community of Sippar, as reflected by the marriage of their daughter into an urban, upper-class Babylonian family. The transition from a mixture of Judean and Babylonian names in the second generation to the exclusively Babylonian names of the third generation reveals that the family deliberately sought to blend into their social world. Given the international character of the Sipparean mercantile community and the evidence of other royal merchants of non-Babylonian origin, it appears that the descendants of Arih are an example of a wider phenomenon.

A Babylonian – or later Persian – background or name was not a prerequisite for serving in the state administration. Even the Babylonian kingship in the sixth century was in the hands of Aramaic and Chaldean tribes which did not belong to the exclusive upper class of Babylonian cities. Examples of foreign officials are numerous, and especially Egyptians were held in high esteem. People with West Semitic names are also attested in high offices, but most Judean officials worked in minor positions in the land-for-service sector. These people were often middlemen between farmers and higher echelons of administration, and they presumably originated from and lived in the same rural

communities as the farmers they administered. A single Judean is attested in a somewhat higher position as a subordinate of the governor of Across-the-River.

The strong presence of non-Babylonians in the state administration is apparently intertwined with the growing importance of Aramaic as an administrative language, and some Judeans belonging to this group were obviously literate. Two Judean *sēpiru*s – Aramaic scribes or clerks – are attested. This is not surprising and some literacy among the Judean deportees is expected, as the deportations targeted the upper classes of Jerusalem. However, nothing written on parchment has survived in the Mesopotamian climate and short Aramaic inscriptions on clay tablets and bricks are the only material evidence of the use of alphabetic scripts. Unfortunately, it is difficult to assign these inscriptions to any particular people, and more research is needed to judge if the inscriptions on tablets were written by cuneiform scribes, the parties involved in the transaction, or someone else.[1315] It has to be emphasised that no Hebrew writings from Babylonia survive, despite the claims that an early tablet from Yāhūdu (C10) bears a short Paleo-Hebrew inscription.[1316] Some of the letter forms in this inscription are indisputably old, but a certain qualification of the script as Paleo-Hebrew is not sustainable on the basis of palaeographic features, clues from the cuneiform text, and conventions regarding the writing of alphabetic epigraphs in Babylonia.[1317] In any case, there were some literate Judeans in Babylonia, and it is possible that some literary production took place among the exiles.

Although the world of the administration and Aramaic was open to deportees, the spheres of the temple cult and cuneiform writing were not. They were dominated by the Babylonian urban upper class, which resided in old cities and traced its ancestry to eponymous forefathers who gave their name to the families. Cuneiform scribes came predominantly from these families, and even the tablets written in remote locations in the countryside were written by Babylonians with family names. There is no evidence that Judeans or other deportees worked as cuneiform scribes, and Babylonian sources do not corroborate the idea that people of foreign origin had access to scribal training. The same applies to the priesthood of Babylonian temples: only certain people were fit for temple service, and priests came from a certain stratum in Babylonian society. Some deportees were attached to temples as free workers or dependants, but they did not make their way into the priesthood which was responsible for the daily offerings and temple service.

Analysis of Judean social networks reveals that deportees were in regular interaction with people from the urban upper class, because even the rural cuneiform scribes belonged to this group. At the same time, deportees and Babylonian scribes and priests did not belong to the same social circles, and they did not come together as friends or business partners or through marriage. A somewhat different group is made up of Babylonian entrepreneurs, some of whom bore family names. These people lived and worked in the same circles as traders of foreign origin, but they did not usually belong to the social networks of Babylonian scribes and priests.

[1315] Aramaic epigraphs on Neo-Babylonian cuneiform tablets will be studied in Rieneke Sonnevelt's forthcoming dissertation (Leiden University).
[1316] Lemaire 2006, 188; Pearce and Wunsch 2014, 112; Pearce 2016b, 231.
[1317] Personal communication with Rieneke Sonnevelt.

The majority of the deportees lived in the countryside, and the Babylonian practice of settling deportees in communities according to their origin offered a favourable environment for preserving culture, identity, and traditions. The state closely supervised these villages and their inhabitants, and the scribe Arad-Gula's permanent residence in the village and the administrative estate of Našar is probably representative of the situation in the land-for-service sector in general. However, supervision does not necessarily entail much cultural interaction between the supervisors and the supervised, and Judean farmers probably knew little about the Babylonian culture which Arad-Gula and his educated colleagues belonged to. A more important factor is the settlement of people in neighbouring villages from different parts of the empire. This is manifested by the analysis of naming practices in the villages of Yāhūdu and Našar, which were undoubtedly located close to each other. Whereas the majority of people attested in Yāhūdu bore Yahwistic names, hardly anybody in Našar bore such names; other West Semitic names prevailed there. Thus, farmers in the land-for-service sector were not surrounded by the Babylonian culture embraced by the urban upper class, but instead they lived in a multicultural environment which mixed influences from Babylonia and abroad. Finally, it must be emphasised that the available sources do not attest to any significant adoption of cultural traits from this multicultural milieu. Very few Judeans bore non-Yahwistic West Semitic names, and the village of Neirab had onomastic characteristics of its own.

In addition to officials, merchants, craftsmen, and other city-dwellers, entrepreneurs such as Ahīqam were in closer interaction with Babylonians than the average farmer. Because of the nature of the business he was involved in, Ahīqam regularly met small farmers, Babylonian officials, and people living in cities. He supported Judean cultural traditions by giving Yahwistic names to his sons, but he had no problem using a seal which depicted a worshipper in front of the divine symbols of Ištar and Marduk. Although Ahīqam lived in Yāhūdu, which was also the focal point of his business activities, he had business partners with Akkadian names and patronymics, and he ran a beer-brewing business in Babylon. Ahīqam's career was probably exceptional rather than typical of Judeans in the land-for-service sector, but it confirms that some deportees could act as important bridges between the city and the countryside, as well as between deportees and native Babylonians.

The previous discussion has shown that deportees were by no means isolated from the rest of society, and people from rural communities visited cities close to them but also farther away. They were in contact with Babylonians and other deportees, and the example of Judean royal merchants shows that some became deeply integrated into urban communities. At the same time, living conditions in rural settlements such as Yāhūdu and Neirab facilitated the cohesion of deportee communities and the preservation of their indigenous culture. Relatively homogenous communities of deportees allowed nurturing of their identity, and nothing brought them into constant interaction with other groups in society. Life in rural communities could stay pretty much the same for centuries and the more dynamic cultural interaction characteristic of urban life was foreign to most rural communities.

The Murašû archive attests to the presence of a lively Judean community in the Nippur region almost two centuries after the deportations from Judah. After a substantial

break of any textual evidence, Jewish communities appear again in Babylonia in the first century CE, and they flourished there until the mid-twentieth century.