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SUMMARY

Judeans in Babylonia: A Study of Deportees in the Sixth and Fifth Centuries BCE

This thesis is a study of Judeans in Babylonia in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. Most of these people arrived in Babylonia from Judah in the early sixth century BCE, being but one of numerous ethnic groups deported and resettled after King Nebuchadnezzar II's conquest of Syria and the Levant. Naming practices among many deportee groups have been thoroughly analysed, but there has been little interest in writing a socio-historical study of Judeans or other immigrants in Babylonia on the basis of cuneiform sources. My thesis aims to fill this gap by conducting a case study of Judean deportees and placing its results in the wider context of Babylonian society. The results from the study of Judeans are evaluated by using a group of Neirabian deportees as a point of comparison. These Neirabians were deported from Syria roughly at the same time as the Judeans and resettled in the village of Neirab in the Babylonian countryside.

This study has three aims. First, I aim to write a social history of Judeans by focusing on their socio-economic status and integration into Babylonian society. 'Integration' refers here to an immigrant's process of adapting oneself to the host society in social, economic, and cultural terms. Second, the study of Judeans will be placed in the wider context of deportations and migration to Babylonia, in order to enhance the understanding of diversity in Babylonian society. The case study of the Neirabian community in Babylonia is of prime importance here. Third, I will study the role of the state in relation to deportees in Babylonia. How can we characterise Babylonian practices and aims of deportation? Moreover, how did the state intervene in the lives of deportees, how did it contribute to the process of integration, and what were its goals?

My sources consist of 289 clay tablets written in Akkadian cuneiform. The texts are legal and administrative documents such as promissory notes, leases, receipts, and lists. The texts are rarely isolates and normally they can be connected to larger private and institutional archives. Analysis of the source texts as part of larger archives significantly contributes to our understanding of the socio-economic framework of these texts and the people attested in them. At the same time, the origin and nature of the available sources have to be taken into account: they were written by scribes who belonged to a small literate minority in Babylonian society. No sources written by the deportees themselves survive. Accordingly, our perspective on Judeans and Neirabians is that of the local elite.

Babylonian sources rarely make the ethnic or geographic origin of people explicit, and naming practices are the most important method to identify immigrants in cuneiform texts. Yahwistic theophoric names – that is, names which refer to the god Yahweh – can be used to identify Judeans in Babylonia. However, only some Judeans bore Yahwistic names, and those with Babylonian and non-Yahwistic West Semitic names can only be identified as Judeans if they had relatives with Yahwistic names. Consequently, the emerging picture is skewed in favour of those families which retained the practice of using Yahwistic names. In the small corpus of 27 texts from the village of Neirab, the

families which used the theophoric elements *Sîn* and *Nusku* in West Semitic names can be identified as Neirabians.

The thesis shows that most Judeans were settled in the Babylonian countryside, especially in marginal regions where land was abundant but the population was small. The deportees were settled in communities according to their geographic origin and integrated into the land-for-service sector of Babylonian agriculture. The deportees were given plots of land to cultivate, and in exchange they were obliged to pay taxes and perform work and military service. Some Judeans were able to profit from the system by working as middlemen between the royal administration and their fellow landholders, while other Judeans worked as minor officials in local administration. Nevertheless, the majority of small farmers lived at a subsistence level.

Not all deportees were settled in the countryside, as their labour was also needed in cities. Foreign craftsmen and soldiers worked in royal service, and a number of deportees made their way to local and regional administrations in Babylonia. A couple of Judean alphabetic scribes are attested in Babylonia, indicating that some Judeans were literate. Judean merchants were involved in long-distance trade, which suggests that they were in contact with regions outside Babylonia as well. Members of foreign royalty were deported to Babylon, and the Judean king Jehoiachin and his retinue were held hostage there in order to prevent rebellions in the vassal state of Judah.

A comparison with the case study of Neirabians and other sources pertaining to deportees in Babylonia shows that the case of Judeans was not unique. The majority of deportees were integrated into the land-for-service system, which was aimed at increasing agricultural output and providing the state with labour, soldiers, and tax income. In addition, foreign professionals were employed in cities, and the worlds of commerce and royal administration were open to some deportees. A relatively small number of deportees were donated to Babylonian temples.

The Babylonian practice of settling deportees in ethnically homogenous rural communities supported the survival of their culture and traditions in the countryside. Although the deportees were integrated into the Babylonian economy and they were closely supervised by the officials in the land-for-service sector, there is less evidence of social and cultural integration. Judean farmers continued to nurture their traditional naming practices still in the late fifth century BCE. Adoption of Babylonian names and culture was faster among those Judeans who lived in cities and were in regular contact with the native population. For example, a family of Judean royal merchants in the city of Sippar was deeply integrated into the local community of traders, and their daughter was able to marry into an upper-class Babylonian family. Very little can be said about Judean religious practices, however. The available sources hardly ever touch upon this issue, and naming practices only indicate that the worship of Yahweh probably continued in some form in the late fifth century BCE.