Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel

Supplement
Volume 11
2022

Mass Deportations – To and From the Levant during the Age of Empires in the Ancient Near East

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Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel

Volume 11 (2022), Supplement

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Information for authors: Information on submitting manuscripts, about transferral and retainment of rights, as well as the correct presentation style for submissions can be found at www.mohrsiebeck.com/hebai by selecting "Manuscripts".

Frequency of publication: One volume with four issues per year

Subscriptions: Information on subscriptions can be found at www.mohrsiebeck.com/hebai under "Subscriptions". For questions on a subscription, please contact us at journals@mohrsiebeck.com.

Online access: Both private and institutional subscriptions include free access to the entire text on our website. Further information about registration and special requirements for institutional users can be found under https://www.mohrsiebeck.com/en/electronic-products.

Printed with the kind assistance of Josef Bollag-Stiftung.

Publisher: Mohr Siebeck GmbH & Co. KG, Postfach 2040, 72010 Tübingen, www.mohrsiebeck.com, info@mohrsiebeck.com

Advertising service: Tilman Gaebler, Postfach 113, 72403 Bisingen. Telefon (07476) 3405, tilman.gaebler@t-online.de.
V.i.S.d.P.: Kendra Mäschke, Mohr Siebeck (maeschke@mohrsiebeck.com).

Typeset by Martin Fischer, Tübingen.
Printed by Gulde-Druck, Tübingen.
Printed in Germany
Printed on age-resistant book paper conforming to ANSII NISO Z39.48-1988.

ISSN 2192-2276 (Print Edition)
ISSN 2192-2284 (Online Edition)

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A Framework for the Study of Deportations to and from the Southern Levant during the Age of the Mesopotamian Empires

This contribution offers a framework for studying the deportations to and from the southern Levant during the Age of the Mesopotamian empires. It begins with a brief sketch of the importance of deportations as an Assyrian colonial means: the interests of the empire in both the imperial heartland and the southern Levant. The second part is dedicated to an overview of the various available sources, written and material alike, on the lives of the deportees, focusing mainly on their interaction with the hosting society. Concluding this contribution are musings on the fate of the deportees following the collapse of the Assyrian Empire and the destructive Babylonian conquest of the southern Levant.

Keywords: Deportations; Southern Levant; Assyria; Babylonia

Introduction

Few turning points in the history of the Levant are comparable to the Assyrian conquest in the late eighth century BCE. Centuries of demographic and economic growth and social consolidation of multi-regional polities – such as the kingdoms of Hamath, Damascus, and Israel – came to an end at the hands of the Assyrian army. For centuries, the Assyrian kings aspired to reach the Mediterranean coast. Only a few (most notably Shalmaneser III) achieved this task, and Tiglath-pileser III was the first to establish firm Assyrian imperial order after leading his armies to subjugate all the major Levantine polities during the 730s BCE.[1] A new imperial era had begun.

1 On the rise of Assyria and the conquest of the Levant, see, among others, E. Frahm, "The Neo-Assyrian Period (ca. 1000–609 BCE)," in *A Companion to Assyria* (ed. E. Frahm; Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 161–208. Recent scholarship on the Assyrian period in the southern Levant includes S. Z. Aster and A. Faust (ed.), *The Southern Levant under Assyrian Domination* (University Park: Eisenbrauns, 2018); A. Faust, *The Neo-Assyrian Empire in the Southwest: Imperial Domination and Its Consequences*

HeBAI 11 Suppl. (2022), 10–24 DOI 10.1628/hebai-2022-0011
ISSN 2192-2276

Upon the conquest of the Levant by Tiglath-pileser III, the Assyrian imperial system that had been developing for centuries began the reorientation of people and resources in accordance with the needs of the empire. Foremost among the colonial means used to achieve this task and break local resistance was the forced movement of conquered populations.[2] The chief destination was the Assyrian heartland, with its immense cities and their vast agricultural hinterland. At the same time, an unknown number of deportees were sent to remote provinces and settled in frontier strongholds to serve as the demographic backbone supporting the imperial apparatus. All in all, a century of Assyrian colonialism in the Levant forced tens of thousands – and perhaps even hundreds of thousands – of men, women, and children to leave their homes and march interminable routes.

The erasure of Levantine social distinctiveness was completed by the Neo-Babylonian state that succeeded Assyria in conquering the Levant. Nebuchadnezzar II marshalled deportations following his subjugation of the last standing Levantine polities and targeted these marches to Babylonia alone in an attempt to recover the land that had been devastated during the wars against Assyria. Significant was the deportation of the Jerusalemites in the 590s and 580s BCE, for this is vividly memorialized in the Hebrew Bible, the only ancient testimony of the unforgettable trauma of deportation.[3]

The following is a suggested framework for studying the deportations to and from the southern Levant during the Age of the Mesopotamian empires. It begins with a brief sketch of the importance of deportations as an Assyrian colonial means: the interests of the empire in both the imperial heartland and the southern Levant. The second part is dedicated to an over-

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021); I. Koch, "Israel and Assyria, Judah and Assyria," in *The Ancient Israelite World* (ed. K.H. Keimer and G.A. Pierce; Routledge, forthcoming).

2 B. Oded, *Mass Deportations and Deportees in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1979); K. Radner, "Economy, Society, and Daily Life in the Neo-Assyrian Period," in *A Companion to Assyria* (ed. E. Frahm; Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 209–228; M. Liverani, *Assyria: The Imperial Mission* (MC 21; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2017), 187–194; K. Radner, "The 'Lost Tribes of Israel' in the Context of the Resettlement Programme of the Assyrian Empire," in *The Last Days of the Kingdom of Israel* (ed. S. Hasegawa *et al.*; BZAW 511; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018), 101–123; J. Valk, "Crime and Punishment: Deportation in the Levant in the Age of Assyrian Hegemony," *BASOR* 384/1 (2020): 77–103. Regrettably, the recent study by K. Sano (*Die Deportationspraxis in neuassyrischer Zeit* [AOAT 466; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2020]) appeared only after the completion of this contribution; I therefore could not integrate the conclusions of this in-depth study.

3 On the Babylonian conquest of the Levant and on Judahites and other West-Semites in Babylonia, see, most recently, A. Vinitzer (ed.), *New Historical Perspectives on the Babylonian Exile, HeBAI* 9/1 (2020).

view of the various available sources, written and material alike, on the lives of the deportees. It deals with deportee communities in the Levant on the one hand and in Assyria and Babylonian on the other, focusing mainly on their interaction with the hosting society. Concluding this contribution are musings on the fate of the deportees following the collapse of the Assyrian empire and the decline of the southern Levant during the days of the Neo-Babylonian empire.

1. Deportation as a Means of Imposing Colonial Order: The Case of the Neo-Assyrian Empire and the Southern Levant

Control over labour has been an essential tool of statecraft throughout human history. Naturally, this practice is more prominent in an empire that needs constant demographic support for monumental constructions, military ambitions, and agricultural productivity.[4] Nevertheless, only a few empires orchestrated large-scale migrations as an essential means to intensify their economy and reshape newly conquered realms, thus entirely altering their human landscape.

The practice of deporting conquered peoples was a fundamental component of Assyrian royal ideology and policy, following a millennium-old Mesopotamian practice of relocating defeated groups into the victorious society.[5] By the days of Tiglath-pileser III and the Sargonid kings, deportations were a common yet catastrophic punishment that removed local resistance and issued an aggressive warning to rival polities.[6] At the same time, the resettlement strategy stimulated a complex logistic system. The state valued the deportees for their demographic contribution and their skills, and directed them to the imperial core and predominantly to the Assyrian heartland (between Assur, Nineveh, and Arba'il), absorbing them into the expanding cities or deploying them in the development of their hinterland.[7] In this framework, the state orchestrated the deportations and

4 C. M. Sinopoli, "The Archaeology of Empires," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23 (1994): 159–180, here 165.

5 On earlier Assyrian resettlement practices, see Liverani, *Assyria*, 187–192; Frahm, this volume.

6 M. Liverani, "Thoughts on the Assyrian Empire and Assyrian Kingship," in *A Companion to Assyria* (ed. E. Frahm; Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 534–546, here 542; Liverani, *Assyria*, 192; Valk, "Crime and Punishment."

7 The Assyrian heartland reached a demographic peak during the Neo-Assyrian period, mainly in the shape of megacities (Liverani, *Assyria*, 165–178) supported by a well-developed hinterland; see J. Ur, "Physical and Cultural Landscapes of Assyria," in *A*

appointed provincial governors who monitored the routes, supported the deportees, and provided shelter, food, and clothing.[8] A more limited number of marches led deportees to the colonial holdings. These include deportees (defeated enemies from conquered polities and/or rivals from Assyria) sent to maintain urban centres or fortresses that guarded topographic corridors[9] and, farther away, to support forces protecting the frontiers, such as the western Iranian plateau facing the mountainous tribes[10] or the southern Levant facing Egypt (detailed below).

An overview of the Assyrian sources and the material records from the southern Levant attests to the devastating results of the conquest on the local landscape. The undefeated Assyrian army and its aggressive strategy led to the deaths of tens of thousands of people in war, famine, and plague; cities and towns were destroyed, havoc was wreaked upon the countryside, and thousands of the survivors were deported.[11] However, as stated by Liverani, "destruction was not the end goal of conquest, merely a necessary preliminary action,"[12] and the final aim was reconstruction in order to respond to the needs of the empire. Indeed, written sources refer to a governor installed at the conquered capital soon after the conquest, responsible for reorganizing and revitalizing the devastated land according to imperial needs.[13] These textual references are corroborated by material remains

Companion to Assyria (ed. E. Frahm; Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 13–35, here 20–30. Further on the importance of agriculture to the empire, its ideological framework, and its use as a means of control, see M. S. Rosenzweig, "Assessing the Politics of Neo-Assyrian Agriculture," *Archaeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association* 29 (2018): 30–50.

8 Radner, "Economy, Society, and Daily Life," 210–211.

9 Frahm, this volume.

10 K. Radner *et al*., "Neo-Assyrian Royal Monuments from Lake Zeribar in Western Iran: A Stele of Sargon II and a Rock Relief of Shalmaneser III," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* 110 (2020): 84–93.

11 A. Faust, "Settlement, Economy, and Demography under Assyrian Rule in the West: The Territories of the Former Kingdom of Israel as a Test Case," *JAOS* 135/4 (2015): 765–789, here 768–769 with literature and 776–778. For a more general overview on the collateral impact of wars on civilians, see D. Nadali and J. Vidal (ed.), *The Other Face of the Battle: The Impact of War on Civilians in the Ancient Near East* (AOAT 413; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014).

12 Liverani, "Thoughts on the Assyrian Empire," 541.

13 Liverani, *Assyria*, 149–156, 179–186; K. L. Younger, "The Assyrian Economic Impact on the Southern Levant in the Light of Recent Study," *IEJ* 65/2 (2015): 179–204. K. Streit's paper on the southern Levant following the Assyrian conquest ("After the Storm: Political, Economic and Socio-Demographic Aspects of the Assyrian Defeat of the Southern Levant," in *Culture of Defeat* [ed. K. Streit and M. Grohmann; Gorgias Studies in the Ancient Near East 16; Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2021], 261–286) was, unfortunately, published too late to be included in this study.

across the western part of the empire, from provincial centres to their hinterland to fortresses guarding topographic corridors. The most densely studied part of the empire is the southern Levant, where intensive archaeological research has shed much light on various aspects of destruction and revitalization. Combined with the written sources, these material remains indicate direct Assyrian rule over regions that previously belonged to Israel, Ashdod, and Gaza.

The Assyrians conquered Israel during the 730s and 720s BCE and concluded the conquest with the installation of Sargon II's official at Samaria (now Samarina) and the repopulation of the city with people conquered in later campaigns.[14] In the following years, the Assyrians divided the erstwhile Kingdom of Israel into smaller administrative units, and while the precise number of these units is still under debate, scholars agree that governors resided at Samaria and Megiddo (Magiddu).

Samaria was not destroyed during the Assyrian conquest and continued to exist for centuries, yet the absence of clear archaeological anchors prevents the chronicling of detailed settlement history.[15] Contrary to that, textual sources provide valuable (and unparalleled) information on the Samarians, regarding the destination of the people taken from the city and the origin of the people brought to repopulate it.[16] Among the reasons for that endeavour was the promotion of Assyrian imperialism by the mere fact that the empire possessed the former capital of the vanquished.[17]

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14 Much ink has been spilled over the exact order of events leading to the conquest of Samaria in the late 720s. See, e.g., most recently, B. Becking, "How to Encounter an Historical Problem? 722–720 BCE as a Case Study," in *The Last Days of the Kingdom of Israel* (ed. S. Hasegawa *et al.*; BZAW 511; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018), 17–32; J. Novotny, "Contextualizing the Last Days of the Kingdom of Israel: What Can Assyrian Official Inscriptions Tell Us?" in ibid., 35–53; E. Frahm, "Samaria, Hamath, and Assyria's Conquests in the Levant in the 720s BCE: The Testimony of Sargon II's Inscriptions," in ibid., 55–86; Zadok, this volume.

15 The absence of stratigraphic sequence and the partial nature of the finds prevent any comprehensive reconstruction of post-Israelite Samaria until the Roman period (R. E. Tappy, "The Annals of Sargon II and the Archaeology of Samaria: Rhetorical Claims, Empirical Evidence," in *The Last Days of the Kingdom of Israel* (ed. S. Hasegawa *et al.*; BZAW 511; Berlin and Boston: de Gruyter, 2018), 147–187. Having said that, dozens of dateable artifacts permit object-oriented studies of the inhabitants of Samaria and their relations with the empires.

16 For analysis of the relevant Assyrian sources for these deportations, see, most recently, Radner, "The 'Lost Tribes of Israel,'" 105–113; Zadok, this volume.

17 Tappy, "Archaeology of Samaria," 186. F. M. Fales ("Why Israel? Reflections on Shalmaneser V's and Sargon II's Grand Strategy for the Levant," in *The Last Days of the Kingdom of Israel* (ed. S. Hasegawa *et al.*; BZAW 511; Berlin and Boston: de Gruyter, 2018), 87–99, here 96) suggested that a prime motivation was the provision of

Megiddo appears once in the Assyrian records as the seat of the eponym of the year 679 BCE, and there is no clear chronological anchor for the date of its establishment as a colonial centre.[18] The former Israelite stable compound (Stratum IVA) was abandoned, and a temporary settlement was established atop it and was eventually superimposed by the Assyrian town (Stratum III).[19] This well-planned settlement included several large buildings identified as housing the administrative apparatus of the province, while most of the hill was occupied by smaller domestic units clustered into insulae.[20] Assyrian Magiddu was densely populated – its density was greater by leaps and bounds than that of the many earlier towns at the site. While there is no reference to its population in the sources (in contrast to Samaria), there is little doubt that its inhabitants were newcomers, considering the deportation of thousands of the previous inhabitants of the northern valleys and the size of the new town. The rationale underlying the investment at Megiddo was its strategic location at the southwestern end of the Jezreel Valley, close to the topographic corridors connecting it to the coastal plain, and it was joined in subsequent decades by forts and settlements established around it.

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agricultural commodities (such as wine, olive oil, and sheep) required to maintain the colonial network. While wine production and olive-oil extraction reached high levels of sophistication and were on a large scale during the last decades of the kingdom, indications from the seventh century BCE are limited to the margins of the former Israelite territory, at Tel Hadid (I. Koch, "Rock-Cut Installations," in *Tel Hadid I* [ed. I. Koch and E. Brand; Monograph Series of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University; University Park and Tel Aviv: Eisenbrauns and Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology, forthcoming]). It is possible that the reorganization of the hill country around Samaria included the abandonment of most of the olive groves that survived the siege and their transformation into pastures serving large prime-aged sheep herds: wool was a highly valued commodity and across the southern Levant there was a shift to expert exploitation of prime-aged sheep during the seventh century BCE, a result of Assyrian involvement as well as local initiatives. See L. Sapir-Hen, "Pax Assyriaca and the Animal Economy in the Southern Levant: Regional and Local-Scale Imperial Contacts," in *Rethinking Israel: Studies in the History and Archaeology of Ancient Israel in Honor of Israel Finkelstein* (ed. O. Lipschits *et al.*; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2017), 341–353.

18 Various historical reconstructions attribute the establishment of Megiddo as a colonial center to Tigalth-pileser III, although his inscriptions do not mention the city or the installation of a governor at any Israelite locale.

19 I. Finkelstein and D. Ussishkin, "Archaeological and Historical Conclusions," in *Megiddo III: The 1992–1996 Seasons* (ed. I. Finkelstein *et al.*; Monograph Series of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University 18; Tel Aviv: Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology, 2000), 576–605, here 597–598, 601–602.

20 J. Peersmann, "Assyrian Magiddo: The Town Plan of Stratum III," in *Megiddo III: The 1992–1996 Seasons* (ed. I. Finkelstein *et al.*; Monograph Series of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University 18; Tel Aviv: Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology, 2000), 524–534.

The Assyrians revived three additional components of the fallen Kingdom of Israel:[21]

- In the Huleh Valley, a new settlement was built on top of the ruins of Israelite Dan (Stratum IIA). The new town (Stratum I) incorporated public buildings and paved streets, with all available space utilized, and became more populous than ever, with the settlement growing to ca. 20 hectares. Housing reached the top of the ridge surrounding the site, with residential neighbourhoods occupying most of the mound.[22]
- In the central coastal plain, the last Israelite town at Tel Dor was abandoned, and the site was rebuilt during the Assyrian period. The finding of Assyrian-style vessels and Phoenician-style vessels in refuse pits demonstrates the town's role in the maritime trade.[23]
- In the Yarkon-Ayalon basin, farther inland and southwards, the destroyed Israelite administrative centre at Gezer was rebuilt as well. While it is difficult to reconstruct its outline, the new town (Stratum V) was associated with Assyrian-style artefacts that might attest to its regional importance.[24] Of particular importance are two cuneiform-inscribed clay tablets from Gezer and another couple of tablets found at neighbouring Tel Hadid that record economic transactions involving individuals with Babylonian and other non-local names during the first half of the seventh century BCE[25] (and see further below). At the same time, small rural settlements appeared on the spurs of the central highland east of the inner coastal plain between Tel Hadid and the Yarkon, either in response to the Assyrian demands for agricultural commodities or within the framework of a planned policy.[26]

21 At the same time, other regions, such as the highland south of Shechem, were left desolate. While those regions had previously been dominated by the Israelite court and had served its interests, the Assyrian interests were different. Since the main aim was to strengthen the imperial system rather than a local elite, some portions of the fallen kingdom of Israel were left deserted, while others prospered.

22 Y. Thareani, "Imperializing the Province: A Residence of a Neo-Assyrian City Governor at Tel Dan," *Levant* 48/3 (2016): 254–283; idem, "From Expelled Refugee to Imperial Envoy: Assyria's Deportation Policy in Light of the Archaeological Evidence from Tel Dan," *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 54 (2019): 218–234.

23 A. Gilboa and I. Sharon, "The Assyrian Kāru at Dor (Ancient Du'ru)," in *The Provincial Archaeology of the Assyrian Empire* (ed. J. MacGinnis *et al.*; Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2016), 241–252.

24 R. Reich and B. Brandl, "Gezer under Assyrian Rule," *PEQ* 117/1 (1985): 41–54; T. Ornan *et al.*, "A Newly Discovered Neo-Assyrian Cylinder Seal from Gezer in Context," *IEJ* 63 (2013): 6–25.

25 N. Na'aman and R. Zadok, "Assyrian Deportations to the Province of Samaria in the Light of Two Tablets from Tel Hadid," *TA* 27 (2000): 159–188.

26 Itach, this volume.

As aforementioned, the Assyrian kings targeted two other polities: Ashdod and Gaza. Sargon II conquered Ashdod, installed an Assyrian official there, deported its people, and brought in an unknown number of deportees. A relatively large (1 hectare) Assyrian-style palace built next to the destroyed city vividly illustrates the region's importance to the Assyrians.[27] Gaza, situated farther to the south in a most critical location – close to Egypt, Assyria's arch-rival, and at one end of the routes crossing the deserts and connecting the Red Sea with the Mediterranean – was also targeted by the Assyrian kings, who led military campaigns there, founded trade centres, elevated local tribe leaders, and deported thousands.[28] Sargon II specifically records the forced resettlement of deportees brought from the Iranian Plateau and Babylonia, and it has been suggested that the target of the deportation was settlements established during the same time, perhaps by the Assyrians.[29]

In sum, the Assyrian kings uprooted tens of thousands of people from the Kingdoms of Israel, Ashdod, and Gaza and forcibly settled in their place people brought from other parts of the empire. They chose specific locales according to their needs, focusing on strengthening imperial control over the topographic corridors leading to Gaza, including rebuilding administrative centres and resettling them.

2. Glimpses of Life in a New Home

Assyrian reliefs portray the moments of conquest, the execution of defeated enemies, the counting of human, animal, and artefact booty, and the deportees being marched into exile. In striking contrast to the depicted atrocities of war,[30] the deportations are portrayed as taking place at a calm

27 Ongoing excavations at Ashdod-Yam point to the prosperity of the town during the late Iron Age, although it is still premature to associate any remains with the Assyrian activity at the region. For an overview of the sources on Ashdod and the material remains for the various sites, see A. Fantalkin, "Neo-Assyrian Involvement in the Southern Coastal Plain of Israel: Old Concepts and New Interpretations," in *The Southern Levant under Assyrian Domination* (ed. S. Z. Aster and A. Faust; University Park: Eisenbrauns, 2018), 162–185.

28 N. Na'aman, "The Boundary System and Political Status of Gaza under the Assyrian Empire," *ZDPV* 120 (2004): 55–72.

29 N. Na'aman and R. Zadok, "Sargon II's Deportations to Israel and Philistia (716–708 B.C.)," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 40/1 (1988): 36–46; N. Na'aman, "An Assyrian Residence at Ramat Rahel?" *TA* 28/2 (2001): 260–280; D. Ben-Shlomo, "Tell Jemmeh, Philistia and the Neo-Assyrian Empire during the Late Iron Age," *Levant* 46/1 (2014): 58–88.

30 A. M. Bagg, "Where Is the Public? A New Look at the Brutality Scenes in Neo-Assyr-

pace: whole families march together, and no one is mistreated[31] – a portrayal that is, indeed, in keeping with the information derived from written sources regarding the provisions and protection that the deportees received from the Assyrian system (above). A handful of sources even indicate that some deportees owned property soon after their arrival.[32]

However, such positive aspects portrayed in the sources should not detract scholars from acknowledging the loss and suffering that accompanied the horrifying events of war, expulsion, and long marches – events that must have contributed to the psychological breakdown of many and the disintegration of social bonds.[33] Upon arrival at their new locale, the deportees were dislocated, facing an unfamiliar landscape and language(s) they did not understand. They had to preserve (yet modify) some of their traditional practices while abandoning others, especially those related to the homeland and its landscape, and had to adopt new practices appropriated from the hosting society.[34] These shared components in the experience of suffering deportation materialized based on changing social positions and reactions to encounters with the locals (continuous exposure vs segregation).

The fate of the Levantine deportees in the imperial heartland is shrouded in obscurity due to the limited information at our disposal. A handful of written sources from the Assyrian heartland refer to individuals labelled "Samarians" or individuals bearing Yahwistic names; these demonstrate the complexity of integration in the Neo-Assyrian Empire and the gap between the royal language of assimilation and the reality of daily affairs. The earlier sources deal with chariot troops integrated into the Assyrian army and artisans participating in the construction of Dur-Sharruken; they thus document the first generation of deportees in the Assyrian heartland. Later sources, from Guzana (Tell Halaf) during the days of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal, and Dur-Katlimmu (Tell Sheikh Hamad) following the collapse of Assyria, are mainly concerned with economic transactions.[35] The individuals mentioned in these sources identified themselves or were

ian Royal Inscriptions and Art," in *Images of War* (ed. L. Battini; AANEA 1; Oxford: Archaeopress, 2016), 57–82.

31 Radner, "Economy, Society, and Daily Life," 211–212.

32 Radner, "The 'Lost Tribes of Israel,'" 119–120.

33 Battini, this volume.

34 Berlejung, this volume; Zadok, this volume.

35 R. Zadok., "Israelites and Judaeans in the Neo-Assyrian Documentation (732–602 B.C.E.): An Overview of the Sources and a Socio-Historical Assessment," *BASOR* 374 (2015): 159–189, here 163–176; Radner, "The 'Lost Tribes of Israel,'" 113–122.

identified by others as associated with Samaria even though they were third, fourth, or even fifth-generation deportees.

In contrast to the limited information on the Israelites in Assyria, a wealth of information on the Judahites in Babylonia during the Neo-Babylonian and the Achaemenid periods is embedded in epigraphic finds and in the Hebrew Bible. Renowned "archives," such as the so-called "al-Yahudu archive," as well as isolated tablets, provide information about members of the Judahite communities and vividly illustrate mundane activities, social stratification among the communities, a range of interactions with other communities of deportees and with the hosting society, and the gradual economic development of deportees and their descendants.[36] The various components embedded in the Hebrew Bible are one of a kind since this is the only non-Mesopotamian written source on the deportations – and thus, the only channel through which scholars may study the long-term experience of being deported and of living in exile.[37] There, one finds a tapestry of ideologically driven references to the events themselves and vivid snapshots of the daily life of deportees and their interactions with the hosting societies in both the southern Levant and Mesopotamia. Their exposure to Babylonian culture led the deportees to increasingly appropriate Mesopotamian topoi and incorporate them into their cosmology and worldview. But above all, as part of their survival and communal resurrection in Babylonia, the deportees were forced to reinvent their social belonging by imposing new rules to maintain boundaries and by explaining their "exilic" condition in faith and narrative through the reshaping of collective memories of the events in the homeland.

Moving to the Levant, our information on the deportees is even more limited. Concerning the northern Levant, royal inscriptions describe the large-scale forced settlement of Assyrian deportees, mostly defeated rivals of the kings, in the lands around the Middle Euphrates and the Orontes, and indirect evidence suggests that they played an influential role in the cultural discourse with the hosting society.[38] Nonetheless, only meagre material remains from these regions attest to the presence of deportees and their interactions with the locals. Conversely, the vast material record from the southern Levant yielded several categories of objects that have played a role in the discourse regarding the Assyrian period. However, one should be cautious about using them as indicators of the presence of deportees, as

36 Berlejung, this volume, and Zadok, this volume, both with literature.
37 Edenburg, this volume, and Strine, this volume, both with literature.
38 Frahm, this volume.

there is a risk of oversimplifying the material record into a Pots-and-People equation.

A secure point of departure is inscribed objects such as the ones found in Samaria that are commonly considered to attest to the presence of people from Mesopotamia. Of these, a bulla stamped by a royal seal, a stele fragment, and a judicial document attest to colonial involvement in the city.[39] It is only the votive cylinder seal mentioning Babylonian deities along with individuals with Babylonian theophoric elements in their names that can be reliably connected to people from Babylonia. The question that arises is whether they were deportees or whether some of the Babylonians could have served the colonial administration.

Another group of inscribed objects are five clay tablets documenting economic transactions unearthed at Tel Gezer, Tel Hadid, and Kh. Kusia.[40] The tablet from Kh. Kusia records a land sale with only one preserved name, possibly Elamite; it was stamped by a seal that might have been imported from Babylonia.[41] Of the two tablets from Tel Hadid, one records a land sale deed from 698 or 697 BCE and mentions several names, all Akkadian but one, which may be Aramean. The other tablet documents a debt note with a pledge from 664 or 663 BCE. It mentions a creditor and a debtor, their names only partially preserved, two West-Semitic named women (the sister and wife of the debtor), and four witnesses – two with Akkadian names, one with an Egyptian name, and one with a West-Semitic name.[42] A similar mixed community is illustrated in the two tablets from Tel Gezer that document land sales, one from 651 or 650 BCE and the other from 649 or 648 BCE. The former tablet mentions Akkadian, Aramean, and Egyptian names, while the latter has a similar composition of names alongside another individual – the seller named Netanyahu.[43] Are these mixed communities of newcomers and locals mingled in their daily activities? While this might be the case, another possibility is that some of the individuals with local names were members of the newcomer community who, after several decades in their new homes,

39 For the cuneiform finds from Samaria, see W. Horowitz *et al.*, *Cuneiform in Canaan: Cuneiform Sources from the Land of Israel in Ancient Times* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2006), 112–115.

40 Na'aman and Zadok, "Assyrian Deportations"; Zadok, this volume.

41 T. Ornan, *Mesopotamian Influence on the Glyptic of Israel and Jordan in the First Millennium B.C.* (Vol. 2, Ph.D. diss., Tel Aviv University, 1997), 333, No. 93.

42 R. Zadok, "Clay Tablets," in *Tel Hadid I* (ed. I. Koch and E. Brand; Monograph Series of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University; University Park and Tel Aviv: Eisenbrauns and Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology, forthcoming).

43 Horowitz et al., *Cuneiform in Canaan,* 55–60.

began to give their children local names – a reflection of their integration into the local landscape.

The tablets from Hadid pose a further complexity. While Tel Gezer features various Assyrian-style seals and high-quality architectural elements, some in Assyrian style, that point to its integration within the colonial network, no such remains are documented from Tel Hadid. One of the two tablets from Tel Hadid was found on the floor of a structure built in local techniques according to a local ground plan, among local-style artefacts, such as pottery and bone objects. The question that arises is: If no tablets had been found at Hadid, would scholars have even considered its inhabitants to be deportees?

Another category of objects is pottery.[44] Typical of the seventh century BCE in the central highland, mainly in rural sites located around Shechem, is a deep bowl in a local form that combines a specific surface treatment originating in southern Mesopotamia – wedge-shaped impressions on their interior.[45] As discussed by Itach *et al.* (following G. London), the surface treatment might suggest a utilitarian purpose associated with food production. In the words of Itach *et al.*, "the wedge impressions are indeed effective in grating vegetables such as onions and other root vegetables, producing a thin paste that could then facilitate food preparation."[46] This type of bowl might serve as a vivid example of newcomers' adaptation: there was a need to replace something they used to have, something that was possibly

44 One group of pottery vessels is the so-called Assyrian Palace Ware, or Assyrian-style pottery, a stylistic group of serving vessels found throughout the southern Levant and predominantly at Tell Jemmeh and Tel Dor. Several studies consider these vessels to have been produced to supply the needs of Assyrian officials or to reflect the presence of potters deported from northern Mesopotamia, although, as stated by N. Na'aman ("Locating the Sites of Assyrian Deportees in Israel and Southern Palestine in Light of the Textual and Archaeological Evidence," in *The Provincial Archaeology of the Assyrian Empire* [ed. J. MacGinnis *et al.*; Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2016], 275–282, here 279), "the problem of the origin of the vessels classified as 'Assyrian-style pottery' is even more complicated, as some of them were discovered in strata that antedated the Assyrian conquest of the kingdom of Israel." Moreover, A. Hunt, who conducted the most detailed study of these vessels thus far, concluded that these vessels reflect the embracement of feasting practices associated with Assyria and hence a local loyalty of fealty to the empire. See A. Hunt, *Palace Ware across the Neo-Assyrian Imperial Landscape: Social Value and Semiotic Meaning* (CHANE 78; Leiden: Brill, 2015); idem, "The Social Value of Semiotic Meaning of Neo-Assyrian Palace Ware," in *The Provincial Archaeology of the Assyrian Empire* (ed. J. MacGinnis *et al.*; Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2016), 71–78.

45 G. Itach *et al.*, "The Wedge-Impressed Bowl and the Assyrian Deportation," *TA* 44 (2017): 72–97.

46 G. Itach *et al.*, "The Wedge-Impressed Bowl," 89.

needed to cook a meal that would remind them of home by taste and aroma. Thus, the adaptation included the appropriation of a local vessel by adding the wedge impression, presumably by a simple request of a newcomer client from a local potter.

Beyond these two sets of sources, the evidence is limited, to the point of being non-existent. No cuneiform writing or wedged-impressed bowls were found thus far at Megiddo or Dan, where Assyrian-style architecture served the imperial administration. In this regard, the large assemblages of north-Levantine and Mesopotamian-style seals in the provincial capitals and other administrative centres are illuminating. In her seminal study, T. Ornan[47] pointed to the concentration of imported seals from Mesopotamia at a few significant sites: Samaria, Megiddo, and Gezer. Moreover, only at Samaria have Neo-Babylonian stamp-seals been uncovered that indicate the city's continued importance in the days of the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid empires. It is impossible to determine who were the owners of the seals during the Neo-Assyrian period: administrators installed at these centres or deportees who carried their valuable personal belongings with them.

To conclude this section, I would make a cautious proposal that the scarcity of material remains associated with deportees stems from a travel restriction – their limited baggage. The deportees depicted marching in the Assyrian reliefs are seen with only the very few belongings they could have carried. Some were fortunate enough to use their animal-driven cart, but in either case, they carried small bags, probably holding their most personal belongings. Minor artefacts such as seals could have arrived by such a mechanism (although these might have belonged to officials as part of their job), but larger objects would have been most likely left behind. In other words, the limited number of material remains associated with the deportees may result from very few large artefacts travelling with them. Such a situation requires scholars to augment the classification of objects with the study of their function. Given the organized character of the deportations, the forced settlement of deportees while maintaining their social structure, and the common tendency in migrant communities to preserve domestic practices, it is hypothesized that meticulous archaeological analyses of domestic behavioural patterns such as cooking, craft such as pottery production, and animal exploitation trends would identify the behavioural patterns of migrants and pinpoint their transformation.

47 Ornan, *Mesopotamian Influence*, 287, 292.

3. Musings on the Aftermath of Deportation

Ultimately, the Assyrian urban endeavour in the southern Levant was a short-lived episode. The region of Gaza might have been destroyed during the instability accompanying the collapse of the Assyrian Empire, perhaps during the conquest of the region by Psamtik I. At the same time, the northern valleys demonstrate remarkable continuity in their significant sites that were joined by satellite towns, despite the transition to Egyptian rule.[48] This was, nevertheless, a brief moment in history. The perpetual Egyptian-Babylonian struggle that reached its climax in the conquest of the Levant by Nebuchadnezzar II led to the destruction of all polities that had survived until then: Judah, the Philistine cities, and the Transjordanian kingdoms. Their urban centres were destroyed, their inhabitants were deported to Babylonia, and officials (some from a local background) governed the surviving rural hinterland. The colonial centres spared no better, and while Neo-Babylonian-style artefacts from Samaria and its environs indicate that imperial involvement was maintained,[49] the aftermath of Megiddo (Stratum II) is unclear due to the partial nature of the material remains; by the mid-sixth century BCE, all other sites in the lowlands were rendered desolate.[50]

This blurred ending of the direct Mesopotamian colonialism in the southern Levant leaves multiple questions unresolved: Given that these centres existed because of their function as nodes in the broader colonial network, how did they survive the Assyrian collapse? Officials and soldiers may have been called back home or left without orders or supplies. How long could they have kept the colonial network active while the colonial hub did not

48 On the settlement pattern of the later Iron IIC in the northern Valleys, see L. Singer-Avitz, "The Pottery of Megiddo Strata III-II and a Proposed Subdivision of the Iron IIC Period in Northern Israel," *BASOR* 372 (2014): 123–145.

49 On Samaria and its people in the post-Assyrian period, see Zadok, this volume, with previous literature.

50 In her study of Dan, Y. Thareani ("Revenge of the Conquered: Paths of Resistance in the Assyrian City of Dan," *Semitica* 60 [2018]: 473–492) suggested that with the weakening of the empire, a short series of unorganized destructions took place over a limited period, leading to the gradual destruction of the structures symbolizing Assyrian power (such as the governor's residence) and eventually, to the abandonment of the city. While the historical context of the collapse of Assyria is valid, the importance of the roads leading to the northern Levant for Egyptian interests might suggest that Dan was maintained until the Babylonian conquest: For most of Babylonia's existence, its people did not invest in the imperial margins (Y. Levavi, "The Neo-Babylonian Empire: The Imperial Periphery as Seen from the Centre," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern History* 7/1 [2020]: 59–84), and this led to the eventual decline of the southern Levant.

function, and what led them to collaborate with the Egyptians? And finally: what happened to the colonists, who were brought under the command or the auspices of the empire in order to serve its needs? Would they mingle with the locals? Would the locals accept them and forget or diminish their previous role as collaborators of the empire?

Scholars currently face a limited array of information in their efforts to contend with these questions. Archaeologically speaking, the Babylonian period and the early Persian period in the southern Levant are largely unknown, and most studies on this period have been dedicated to the material remains from the central highland.[51] Other regions have been only sparsely studied, and it is hoped that new intriguing information will emerge from current excavations, such as at Ashdod-Yam and Tel Hadid, as well as from the complete publication of various sites and the reanalysis of others.

Epigraphic finds from Babylonia continue to reflect the lives of the Judahites during the sixth century and the Achaemenid period, and important additional information is gleaned from the Hebrew Bible. However, the Persian- and early Hellenistic-period texts provide a faded memory of Assyria and the deportations from the Levant, perhaps overshadowed by the trauma of the destruction of Jerusalem.[52] As for the Assyrian deportations, the texts describing the Persian period in the southern Levant provide limited information on the residents of Samaria, restricted to their Babylonian background and their Yahwistic orientation. At the same time, meagre information is provided regarding the post-destruction inhabitants of Judah, confined mainly to the role of opponents to the returnees who came from Babylonia under Achaemenid auspices and brought with them ideas developed in the exile.[53] Ultimately, a protracted local-newcomer dialogue led to the acceptance of a binary, theologically driven narrative: all Judahites had to leave for Babylonia, and most of them returned to an empty land.

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51 O. Lipschits *et al.*, *Ramat Rahel VI: The Renewed Excavations by the Tel Aviv-Heidelberg Expedition (2005–2010), The Babylonian-Persian Pit* (Monograph Series of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University 40; University Park and Tel Aviv: Eisenbrauns and Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology, 2021).

52 Levin, this volume.

53 See, inter alia, D. Rom-Shiloni, *Exclusive Inclusivity: Identity Conflicts between the Exiles and the People Who Remained (6th–5th Centuries BCE)* (LHBOTS 543; New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013).

Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel

volume 11 (2022), Supplement

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HeBAI-11-2022-Supplement