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A possible scenario for the third deportation in 582 BCE

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The impact of the Babylonian period for Judah must be reconstructed mainly from the scant information in the Bible, which is often theologically overpainted so that it is difficult to grasp the historical core. The third deportation of Judah mentioned in Jer 52:30 has been difficult to link to a historical event. It has often been thought that the rebellion against Gedaliah was the main reason for the third deportation. A newly found stele offers an alternative, providing a reason for the third deportation and perhaps also for the imprisonment of Jehoiachin.

In the following article,¹ first the deportation list in Jer 52:28–30 will be analyzed to expose its historical core, which is based on a Babylonian archival document with reliable counts. Second, the rule of Gedaliah will be critically examined in order to determine whether the reign of Gedaliah lasted up to 583/2 or 582/1 BCE.² Third, the account of a Babylonian campaign against Transjordan and Egypt mentioned by Flavius Josephus will be discussed as a possible reason for the third deportation. Fourth, the newly found stele and its historical impact will be considered and finally related to biblical historiography.

1 The deportation list (Jer 52:28–30)

Jer 52:28–30

²⁸*This (is) the population whom Nebuchadnezzar took into exile:
In year 7, 3,032 Judeans.*

1 I would like to express my thanks to Annelisa Burns, Chicago, for correcting and improving my English. Of course, all remaining mistakes are my own.

2 All dates reckon with the beginning of the New Year in spring so that the writing 582/1 BCE signifies the period approximately from April 582 to March 581 BCE. This notation should not be misunderstood that both years 582 and 581 BCE are equally possible.

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²⁹In year 18 of Nebuchadnezzar, from Jerusalem 832 persons.

³⁰In year 23 Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguard took into exile Judeans, 745 persons; the total of persons (was) 4,600.

In the biblical narrative of 2 Kings 24–25, the number of exiled Judeans not only varies amongst itself, but also from the counts given in the deportation list of Jer 52:28–30:

1. In the first deportation in 598/7 BCE either ca. 10,000 (2 Kings 24:14) or 8,000 (2 Kings 24:16) people were exiled. The different counts in 2 Kings 24 might be explained in different ways.³ Either one must put together both figures, so that one gets a total of 18,000 people, or the second number would clarify the first figure, in the sense that it is about 7,000 men with property and fit for military service and 1,000 craftsmen. However, 2 Kings 24:14 appears to be a doublet to 2 Kings 24:15–16 as the mentioned groupings partly overlap. Moreover, the syntax with *w-qatal* in 2 Kings 24:14 is different from the surrounding *wayy-iqtol*. This syntactic difference could indicate a redactional expansion. Thus, only the count of 8,000 people seems to be reliable. However, the difference from Jer 52:28, which reckons only with 3,023 Judeans taken into exile, is striking. The first deportation most probably possessed an agenda in which the kingdom of Zedekiah might be humbled and expected to not lift itself up again (Ezek 17:13–14). In any case, the first wave of these deportations seems to have been the strongest compared to the other two deportations.⁴
2. Though the second deportation saw the entire population taken away (2 Kings 25:11–12; Jer 52:15–16; 39:9), Jer 52:29 gives an accurate figure of only 823 Jerusalemites for the second deportation. Remarkably, only people from the capital Jerusalem had to go into exile according to Jer 52:29.
3. Moreover, 745 Judeans were led away in a third deportation, recorded only in Jer 52:30.⁵ The reason of the third deportation is unknown so far.

³ For the problem of different numbers in 2 Kings and Jeremiah see Rainer Albertz, *Die Exilszeit: 6. Jahrhundert v. Chr.*, *Biblische Enzyklopädie 7* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2001), 75 f.; Oded Lipschits, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 59 n.85.

⁴ See Hermann-Josef Stipp, *Jeremia 25–52*, *HAT 1/12,2* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2019), 829. Dieter Vieweger, *Geschichte der Biblischen Welt: 2. Eisenzeit* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2019), 359 assumes a heavy and extensive blood-letting in Jerusalem and Judah.

⁵ Ernst Axel Knauf and Philippe Guillaume, *A History of Biblical Israel: The Fate of the Tribes and Kingdoms from Merenptah to Bar Kochba*, *Worlds of the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2016), 140 f. consider the third group of deportees as being responsible for Second Isaiah and later recognizing the Persian rule. This group was trained in the poetico-prophetic tradition.

It is a matter of debate whether the biblical figures in Jer 52:28–30 number the exact size of the deportations. Perhaps only the head of the households are mentioned, meaning that the figure should be much larger. If one assumes that each household contains at least four people, then one arrives at a figure of 18,400 people who were taken away into exile.⁶

However, the biblical idiom *næfæš*, »soul, person«, used in Jer 52:28–30 does refer to man and woman alike, so it is improbable that only the head of households or the free men are counted. If only 4,600 persons are taken into exile, only 5% of the population of Judah or even less was deported,⁷ which seems a rather low count. Such a small group is striking since the Assyrians and Babylonians usually resettled large populations. In addition, such a small group would hardly receive the influence in literary production that this group apparently did.⁸

Perhaps only some of the deportees were included on this list, especially since only people from Jerusalem are explicitly named in the second deportation.⁹ Perhaps the deportees mentioned in Jer 52:28–30 were dedicated to the temples of Babylon since prisoners of war were also transferred, sometimes explicitly, to the temples.¹⁰ Thus, the data of Jer 52:28–30 might refer only to a part of the deportees since 4,600 persons is a small number compared to counts of the usual deportation practice. Therefore, it is obvious that there had already been defectors and prisoners of war who were not included on the list.

That being said, the deportation list in Jer 52:28–30 might be regarded as an historically accurate tradition for the following reasons:

1. Jer 52:1–30 is nearly identical with 2 Kings 24:18–25:21, except for Jer 52:28–30. This small account with exact figures of three deportations disrupts the narrative about the fall of Jerusalem and the consequences. Thus, it appears that Jer 52:28–30 derived from another source. This independent list was inserted into the narrative taken from 2 Kings.

⁶ For this problem see Ernst Axel Knauf, »Wie kann ich singen in fremdem Land? Die ›babylonische Gefangenschaft‹ Israels,« *BiKi* 55 (2000) 132–139: 133; Knauf and Guillaume, *History*, 139. For counting only the free men, see Vieweger, *Geschichte*, 359. Against this background, 75–90% of the Judean elite went into exile in three waves of deportations. See Knauf, »Land«: 134 n.9.

⁷ See Ernst Axel Knauf and Hermann Michael Niemann, *Geschichte Israels und Judas im Altertum*, De Gruyter Studium (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2021), 320.

⁸ See Othmar Keel, *Die Geschichte Jerusalems und die Entstehung des Monotheismus: 1.Teil*, OLB IV/1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 2007), 617.

⁹ See Albertz, *Exilszeit*, 78 f.

¹⁰ Nabonid once dedicated 2,850 prisoners of war from *Hume* to the temples of Babylon according to the Babylonstele of Nabonid IX: 31'–42', see Hanspeter Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon und Kyros' des Großen samt den in ihrem Umfeld entstandenen Tendenzschriften: Textausgabe und Grammatik*, AOAT 256 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2001), 527 f.

2. Moreover, the data used in this short notice contradicts the number of Judeans taken in exile according to the tradition in 2 Kings,¹¹ so it is doubtful whether the same author/redactor formed these different figures. With this in mind, it is more probable that the data of Jer 52:28–30 was taken by the authors/redactors of 2 Kings from a separate source.
3. The dating system used in Jer 52:28–30 corresponds to Babylonian chronological rules,¹² since otherwise, in the Book of Jeremiah, the accession year of Nebuchadnezzar is already counted as the first year of his reign, as is made clear by the synchronisms of the Book of Jeremiah. In the usual chronological scheme, Jer 25:1 equates the 4th year of Jehoiakim with the 1st year of Nebuchadnezzar (605/4 BCE), which is his accession year according to Babylonian chronology. Moreover, Jer 32:1 equates the 10th year of Zedekiah with the 18th year of Nebuchadnezzar (588/7 BCE) and the year before the fall of Jerusalem, which happened in the 11th year of Zedekiah (2 Kings 24:18; 25:2; Jer 1:3; 39:2; 52:5) and the 19th year of Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:8; Jer 52:12). The 7th year of Nebuchadnezzar, in biblical chronology and also in the Book of Jeremiah, would be the year 599/8 BCE, predating the first Jerusalem campaign and the first deportation, which is precisely dated in the Babylonian Chronicle to the 2nd Adar 598/7 BCE.¹³ Therefore, the campaign to Jerusalem was carried out in 598/7 BCE, which is the 8th year of Nebuchadnezzar in biblical chronology (2 Kings 24:12), but the 7th year of Nebuchadnezzar according to Babylonian counting. All things considered, Jer 52:28 definitively uses Babylonian, not biblical, chronology. The same holds true for the other two datings in Jer 52:28–30. Thus, the second deportation took place in 587/6 BCE, after the fall of Jerusalem, and the third in 582/1 BCE.¹⁴ Ultimately, it seems rather probable that Jer 52:28–30 is an official Babylonian archi-

¹¹ See the chart in J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Louisville: Westminster, 2006), 481.

¹² See Stipp, *Jeremia*, 819 f.

¹³ BM21946, Chronicle 5:11'–13': *The 7th year, in the month of Kislev, the king of Akkad mustered his troops, marched on Hatti, and set up his quarters facing the city of Yehud. In the month of Adar, the second day, he took the city and captured the king. He installed there a king of his choice. He collected its massive tribute and went back to Babylon*, see Jean-Jacques Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles, Writings from the Ancient World 19* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2004), 230 f. The 2nd Adar 598/7 BCE can be interpreted as 16th March 597 BCE, see Manfred Weippert, *Historisches Textbuch zum Alten Testament*, GAT 10 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 2010), 417 n.98.

¹⁴ Miller and Hayes, *History*, 481 think that the deportations mentioned in Jer 52:28–29 refer to people being captured a year before the fall of Jerusalem, thus harmonizing the different chronological systems used in Jer 52:28–30 and eliminating the differences between the portrayal of the deportations in 2 Kings 24–25 and Jer 52. According to Arthur J. Nevins, »When was Solomon's Temple burned down? Reassessing the Evidence,« *JOT* 31 (2006) 3–25: 5 f. it is also possible that the destruction of the temple took place in 582/1 BCE or even later.

- val source listing the number of exiles from Judah, because this list uses a dating system which is different from the chronological data elsewhere in the Bible and especially in the Book of Jeremiah. There is no reason why the authors/redactors of the Book of Jeremiah would have deviated from the usual dating system.
4. The dating after the regnal years of Nebuchadnezzar and not after the reigning Judean king is remarkable and could refer to a Babylonian source. It is incomprehensible as to why the authors/redactors of the Book of Jeremiah should not have used the Judean king as a reference here.
 5. The circle around Jeremiah was of a pro-Babylonian mindset. It is therefore not surprising that Nebuzaradan, the Babylonian chief of the bodyguard, treated Jeremiah with special courtesy (Jer 39:11–14). Thus, it is possible that the authors/redactors of the Book of Jeremiah could have gotten archival data from the Babylonians.
 6. The designation of the deportees as »Judeans« is also common on Babylonian lists, as can be seen on Babylonian lists referring to provisions for deportees.¹⁵ This linguistic detail might also suggest that Jer 52:28–30 is a Babylonian administrative document.¹⁶
 7. Furthermore, Assyrian and Babylonian sources always count the prisoners in a non-gender-specific way, meaning that all persons are considered and not only the heads of the households. In that respect, the use of *næfæš* in Jer 52:29–30 might be the Hebrew translation of the Akkadian idiom *napištu*, »person«, which is used with deportations as well.¹⁷
 8. The figures given in Jer 52:28–30 are very detailed and most likely not bound by theological guidelines. Moreover, they are not set too high. Even the total figure of 4,600 persons seems credible.¹⁸ No ideology of an »empty land« dictates the counts in Jer 52:28–30, in contrast to the figures of 2 Kings 24–25.¹⁹

15 Cf. the Babylonian provisioning list Text B (Babylon 28178 = VAT 16283) Vs. II, 40, who mentions 8 *amēlYa-a-hu-da-a-a* »8 Judeans«, see Ernst F. Weidner, »Jojachin, König von Juda, in babylonischen Keilschrifttexten,« in *Mélanges Syriens offerts à Monsieur René Dussaud 2*, Bibliothèque archéologique et historique 30.2 (Paris: Geuthner, 1939) 923–935: 925. The same 8 Judeans are referred to in Text A (Babylon 28122) Vs. 26 (*amēlYa-ú-d[a-a-a]*) and Rs 28 (*amēlYa-da-a-a*), see Weidner, »Jojachin«: 927 n.2. Furthermore, there is another Judean with name Ur-milki who is labelled *amēlYa-ú-da-a-a*; see Text A (Babylon 28122) Vs 11 and Rs 13, see Weidner, »Jojachin«: 927.

16 See Albertz, *Exilszeit*, 77; Keel, *Geschichte*, 616.

17 See Albertz, *Exilszeit*, 77.

18 According to Knauf and Niemann, *Geschichte*, 306, only the figures of Jer 52:28–30 are reliable. In contrast, Benjamin Ziemer, »Das 23. Jahr Nebukadnezars (Jer 52,30) und die ›70 Jahre für Babel‹,« in *Nichts Neues unter der Sonne? Zeitvorstellungen im Alten Testament. FS E.-J. Waschke*, ed. J. Kotjatko-Reeb, BZAW 450 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014) 187–212: 200 refers to the phenomenon of (pseudo) »exact« numbers, well known from Assyrian inscriptions.

19 See Keel, *Geschichte*, 616.

9. Only the round figure of 4,600 persons seems suspicious.²⁰ The preference for the number 23 is striking in this list, since the first count is 3,023 Judeans, the third deportation is dated to the 23rd year of Nebuchadnezzar, and the total amount of deportees is $200 \times 23 = 4,600$ persons.²¹ However, this could be pure coincidence, since the number 23 is not a number with significance elsewhere. Maybe Jer 25:3 took the number 23 from this list.
10. The section Jer 52:28–30 is missing in LXX. This omission could indicate that this list comes from a separate source, or Jer 52:28–30 might be deliberately absent in LXX because LXX tries to deny a second deportation,²² especially since only Zedekiah would have been taken to Babylon. Furthermore, it is possible that LXX omitted the list in order to avoid the different numbers.²³ This theory, in turn, speaks for the originality of the list. LXX at least recognized the unique character of Jer 52:28–30.
11. The third deportation in Jer 52:30 is hardly possible within the scope of the Book of Jeremiah, since Jer 52:27 assumes that Nebuchadnezzar has deported Judah already in 587/6 BCE. Therefore, there would not be any Judeans eligible for deportation in 582/1 BCE.²⁴ Subsequently, Jer 52:30, at least, cannot be harmonized with the previous text. Thus, it is likely that the whole list is distinct from the context.
12. Jer 52 is not only a simple appendix to the Book of Jeremiah, but a necessary conclusion, since it restates the fulfilment of the exile prophesied by Jeremiah.²⁵ It is therefore not surprising that Jer 52 not only reproduces the template in 2 Kings, but also introduces new data. Therefore, it is quite possible that the authors/redactors also used new data from available sources.

All things considered, it is highly probable that Jer 52:28–30 is taken from an authentic Babylonian archival source. Therefore, this list could claim historical credibility. While the first two deportations are deeply rooted in biblical tradition, the third deportation lacks this kind of support. Most often, the assassination of Gedaliah

²⁰ See Stipp, *Jeremia*, 828.

²¹ Maybe the author of this list has used a historical message of the third deportation in year 23 and then has built this list around the number 23. For this problem see Ziemer, »Jahr«: 201, who argues against a Babylonian list.

²² See Keel, *Geschichte*, 615.

²³ See Albertz, *Exilszeit*, 76 n.134.

²⁴ See Stipp, *Jeremia*, 820.

²⁵ For the differences between Jer 52 and 2 Kings 25 see Georg Fischer, »Don't forget Jerusalem's Destruction! The Perspective of the Book of Jeremiah,« in *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Rise of the Torah*, ed. P. Dubovsky et al., FAT 107 (Tübingen: Mohr, 2016) 291–311: 293–295.

is considered the reason for a Babylonian retaliatory strike combined with a third deportation. This thesis will be evaluated in the following.

2 The failed Gedaliah »experiment«

After the conquest of Jerusalem in 587/6 BCE, Gedaliah was appointed as Babylonian administrator in Mizpah to regulate the conditions in Judah.²⁶ Sometimes it is assumed that Gedaliah was even a vassal king of Babylon.²⁷ This assumed kingship could also have triggered a backlash in Judah, since Gedaliah was not of Davidic descent. It is therefore not surprising that Gedaliah and his entourage were murdered by Ishmael (Jer 41:1–9). As a result, part of the population of Mizpah tried to escape to the East Bank, but this attempt was thwarted. However, some managed to escape to Egypt to be safe from Babylonian retaliation.

It is repeatedly assumed that Gedaliah's murder was the trigger for the third deportation in 582/1 BCE, meaning that the office of Gedaliah lasted until 582/1 BCE.²⁸ However, this thesis presupposes two assumptions which are dubious: the kingship of Gedaliah and the length of his rule. These prerequisites will be checked in the following.

26 Joel Weinberg, »Gedaliah, the Son of Ahikam in Mizpah: His Status and Role, Supporters and Opponents,« *ZAW* 119 (2007) 356–368: 358–360 analyzes the appointment-formula and concludes that Gedaliah was an officially installed representative of the Jewish »remnant« before the Babylonian authorities in Judah.

27 See Miller and Hayes, *History*, 482–487; Knauf and Guillaume, *History*, 137 f.; Knauf and Niemann, *Geschichte*, 302 f. In contrast Bob Becking, *From David to Gedaliah: The Book of Kings as Story and History*, OBO 228 (Fribourg: Acad. Press, 2007), 152; Edward Lipiński, *A History of the Kingdom of Jerusalem and Judah*, OLA 287 (Leuven: Peeters, 2020), 97 regard Gedaliah simply a governor since his doings reflect the role of a governor.

28 See Wolfgang Oswald, *Israel am Gottesberg: Eine Untersuchung zur Literaturgeschichte der vorderen Sinaiperikope Ex 19–24 und deren historischem Hintergrund*, OBO 159 (Fribourg: Acad. Press, 1998), 134 f.; Albertz, *Exilszeit*, 83 f.; Miller and Hayes, *History*, 486; Weinberg, »Gedaliah«: 357; Knauf and Guillaume, *History*, 138; Melanie Peetz, *Das Biblische Israel: Geschichte – Archäologie – Geographie* (Freiburg: Herder, 2018), 171; Bernd U. Schipper, *Geschichte Israels in der Antike*, C.H.Beck Wissen 2887 (München: Beck, 2018), 69; Vieweger, *Geschichte*, 364. See also Christian Frevel, *Geschichte Israels*, Kohlhammer Studienbücher Theologie (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2018), 324 who refers to Flavius Josephus connecting the murder of Gedaliah with the Babylonian counterattack (Jos Ant 10:180–182). However, Keel, *Geschichte*, 615 simply states that the reason for the third deportation is unknown. For the motives of Ishmael killing Gedaliah see Eric Peels, »The Assassination of Gedaliah (Jer. 40:7–41:18),« in *Exile and Suffering: A Selection of Papers Read at the 50th Anniversary Meeting of the Old Testament Society of South Africa Pretoria, August 2007*, ed. B. Becking, OTS 50 (Leiden: Brill, 2009) 83–103: 90–92.

First, it is not at all clear from the sources whether Gedaliah was appointed as the last vassal king in Mizpah. The arguments put forward are not valid enough:²⁹

1. The »servant of the king«, Jaazaniah, mentioned on a seal found in Mizpah, need not be identical with a minister of Gedaliah, especially since this name was used relatively frequently.³⁰ Moreover, the title »servant of the king« is only securely attested in pre-exilic times. Whether this title was still used in Gedaliah's time is possible, but not verifiable. In addition, the seal may have come from pre-exilic times and reached Mizpah in a fashion that can no longer be determined.
2. The »daughters of the king« mentioned in Jer 41:10 are usually interpreted as daughters of Gedaliah. However, the princesses mentioned here—like the assassin Ishmael—may have been distant relatives from the Davidic family. Perhaps part of the royal harem was moved to Mizpah in order to give this place a certain upgrade.³¹
3. Moreover, the royal title cannot be linked to Gedaliah since the idiom *rabbê hammælæk* in Jer 41:1 with *hammælæk* referring to Gedaliah is text-critically dubious. In that respect, only MT reads in Jer 41:1 »Ishmael, son of Nethaniah, son of Elishama, of royal descent and the chief officers of the king«, with the »king« mentioned here being Gedaliah, whereas the Alexandrian text only has »Ishmael the son of Nathaniah the son of Eleasa of royal descent« and leaves the »chief officers of the king« unmentioned.³² Therefore, *rabbê hammælæk* seems to be a short gloss and cannot prove to be historically reliable. The same holds true for Jer 39:13 with *rabbê hammælæk*—here referring to the Babylonian king—being a surplus of MT. Therefore, the idiom *rabbê hammælæk* belongs to a later redaction, not to the oldest text stratum.³³ All in all, *rabbê hammælæk* is a later invention and not a description of the royal officers of »king« Gedaliah.

²⁹ See also the criticism in Peels, »Assassination«: 87; Erasmus Gass, »Assur, Rute meines Zorns« (Jes 10,5): Zur Situation der assyrischen Provinzen in der südlichen Levante,« *ZDPV* 133 (2017) 53–83: 64 f.; Erasmus Gass, »Zwei neue Konstruktionen einer Geschichte Israels: Überlegungen zur Methodik und zu deren Ergebnissen,« *BibOr* 78 (2021) 608–633: 618 f.

³⁰ However, Grabbe 2006, 191 considers this identification a »moderate probability«.

³¹ According to Peels, »Assassination«: 87 n.7 the »daughters of the king« are »an elite company entrusted to Gedaliah«.

³² According to Juha Pakkala, »Gedaliah's Murder in 2 Kings 25:25 and Jeremiah 41:1–3,« in *Scripture in Transition. FS R. Sollamo*, ed. A. Voitiola and J. Jokiranta, JSJ.S 126 (Leiden: Brill, 2008) 401–411: 406 *rabbê hammælæk* is a short gloss to increase the standing of Ishmael and aggravate his treachery. Furthermore, this gloss could legitimate his coup. Peels, »Assassination«: 89 n.15 regards this addition a dittography.

³³ See especially Hermann-Josef Stipp, »Gedaliah und die Kolonie von Mizpah,« *ZAR* 6 (2000) 155–171: 164.

Ultimately, it is questionable whether Gedaliah was a Babylonian vassal king, especially since the biblical evidence does not provide any definite clues. In that respect, the claim that the assassination of Gedaliah was due to dynastic reservations cannot stand.

The length of Gedaliah's term of office is also disputed, especially because he allegedly initiated a land reform that supposedly could not have been implemented within a few weeks. However, there are many reasons supporting a relatively short rule of Gedaliah, as is seen in the following:³⁴

1. According to the biblical texts, Gedaliah most probably reigned only a few months (from the 5th to the 7th month of 587/6 BCE; see 2 Kings 25:8,25). According to 2 Kings 25, a rather quick sequence of deportation, murder of Gedaliah, and flight of the Egyptian group can be assumed.
2. If the assassination happened at a later time, one would have expected that a certain year would have been specified. This holds true also for the Book of Jeremiah. In other cases, without a year in the Book of Jeremiah, the immediate context disambiguates this blank position so that the year given in Jer 39:2 should be assumed as well.³⁵ Consequently, according to the biblical picture, the term of office was only 2–3 months.
3. Furthermore, there are good reasons to doubt that there had been any land reform at all. If Gedaliah had carried out such a social reform, he would certainly have attracted the sympathies of the people, as opposed to Ishmael's coup. Yet the loyalty of the Judeans was on the side of Ishmael and not of Gedaliah.³⁶ Besides, the Babylonians are never seen as social benefactors in the biblical texts, and Gedaliah would certainly have acted in accordance with Babylon. Therefore, it is rather unlikely that there was any land reform at all under Gedaliah.
4. If Ishmael murdered Gedaliah due to patriotic motives to restore the Davidic dynasty, he would have done so shortly after the installation of Gedaliah. There is no reason for Ishmael to wait 4–5 years to get rid of this Babylonian collaborator.
5. What happens in the meantime, between conquest and assassination (Jer 40:10–12), fits very well into a short chronology: Gedaliah calls for the harvest of wine, summer fruit, and oil. The fifth month is the time of the fruit harvest, while the sixth and seventh months are the time for gathering of wine and olives. There is no mention of grain sowing and harvesting, which follow in the agricultural

³⁴ For a short term of office see Stipp, »Gedalja«: 164 f.; Lipschits, *Fall*, 100 f.; Becking, *David*, 147; Peels, »Assassination«: 95 f.

³⁵ See Peels, »Assassination«: 96.

³⁶ See Stipp, »Gedalja«: 169–171.

year.³⁷ Considering this background, it is probable that Gedaliah ruled only in this short period during the harvest season.

6. The special fasts in later Jewish tradition appear to be related to the same year, meaning that the fast remembering the assassination of Gedaliah refers to the year of the destruction of Jerusalem as well.³⁸ There is no reason to assume another year for this fast.
7. Finally, the extension of the rule until the third deportation in 582/1 BCE is only possible on condition that one seeks a valid reason for the deportation. The murder of Gedaliah and the Babylonian occupation force would consequently have compelled such a Babylonian intervention. But all this is pure conjecture.

In conclusion, neither the claim that considers assumed kingship as the motivation for Gedaliah's murder nor the assumption of the extended length of his rule are convincing. Thus, the reason for the third deportation must be considered anew.

3 The doubtful tradition of Flavius Josephus

The third deportation is usually connected to a Babylonian conquest of Ammon and Moab by Nebuchadnezzar as told by Flavius Josephus.³⁹ If Nebuchadnezzar was operating in Transjordan, it is possible that he also crushed a revolt in Judah and deported the elite.

However, it appears that Josephus only used several passages from the Book of Jeremiah to construct his account. Relying on these biblical texts, he structured his rather detailed account of a Babylonian campaign in the Levant and Egypt.⁴⁰ Josephus most probably constructed a narrative fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecies predicting Nebuchadnezzar's extermination of the Judeans who fled to Egypt. In this context, Josephus applied Jer 52:30 for dating this campaign of destruction.

³⁷ See Ziemer, »Jahr«: 191.

³⁸ See Peels, »Assassination«: 96.

³⁹ See Jos Ant 10:180–182.

⁴⁰ Craig W. Tyson, »Josephus, Antiquities 10.180–82, Jeremiah and Nebuchadnezzar,« *JHS* 13 (2013) 1–16: 14 refers to the oracle of Jer 43:8–13 predicting that Nebuchadnezzar would attack Egypt, to the deportation list in Jer 52:30, to the Ammonite involvement in the assassination of Gedaliah according to Jer 40:14 and pairing it with Moab, and to the oracles against Egypt, Moab, and the Ammonites in Jer 46 and Jer 48:1–49:6.

Moreover, it is rather improbable that the Greek sources used by Josephus had detailed accounts of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. It appears that these sources had only a vague idea of a campaign of Nebuchadnezzar and consequent deportations, but no further details. Thus, the in-depth account of this Babylonian campaign was invented by Josephus himself or taken from other unknown sources.⁴¹

The deportation of Jews from Egypt to Babylonia associated with this campaign is also not based on actual events, but on midrashic traditions. The basis for this hypothesis is a fragment of Pseudo-Jeremiah found in Cave 4 at Qumran.⁴²

All things considered, the account of Josephus must be by no means considered to be based on historical sources,⁴³ especially since the Egyptian campaign, which is associated with a killing of the Pharaoh, is highly questionable and historically incorrect,⁴⁴ since Pharaoh Apries still ruled until 570 BCE. Thus, the narrative of Josephus cannot be taken as a reconstruction of historical events.

4 An Egyptian campaign in 583/2 BCE

A sandstone stele that can be dated to the 7th year of Pharaoh Apries was unearthed on August 8, 2011, during rescue excavations on *Tell Defenneh*. The stele—broken in two—is 2.29 m high, 0.83 m wide, and 0.48 m thick. The left side of the stele is lost. The remaining part of the stele bears the marks of blows and fire. Despite the fragmentary character, one can understand the most important statements. It reads:⁴⁵

‘In the year 7, in the fourth month of summer, his majesty went up to Sinai, taking the road eastward to its limit, the army of the country following him, the inhabitants of the foreign countries accompanying his majesty, the king himself; he made the place of battle favourable to him, he collected the lists of conscripts, he formed the troops and promoted the company leaders; he set up a protective enclosure around Egypt by making all its roads impassable, when a mission comes from one bad in character because of the declaration of [...] of arms, who is faithful to his Majesty, making sure to act in his interest by saying: »The prince [...] the Road-[of Horus]

41 See Tyson, »Josephus«: 15.

42 See Israel Eph'al, »Nebuchadnezzar the Warrior: Remarks on his Military Achievements,« *IEJ* 53 (2003) 178–191: 185 who refers to 4QApocryphon on Jeremiah C^a, fragment 18.

43 See also Erasmus Gass, *Die Moabiter: Geschichte und Kultur eines ostjordanischen Volkes im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, ADPV 38 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 210 f.

44 See also Wolfgang Zwickel, »Ägyptische Außenpolitik in den Jahren vor dem Untergang Judas und die Sicht des Jeremiabuches,« in *Egypt and the Hebrew Bible: Proceedings of the Conference Celebrating 40 Years ÄAT, Munich, 6–7 Dec. 2019*, ed. S.J. Wimmer and W. Zwickel, ÄAT 100 (Münster: Zaphon, 2022) 211–281: 269.

45 See the transcription in Mohamed Abd el-Maksoud and Dominique Valbelle, »Une Stèle de l'An 7 d'Apriès: Découverte sur le Site de Tell Défenneh,« *Revue d'Égyptologie* 64 (2013) 1–12: 4.

to conceal his action; he guarded the entrance of the way to the desert [...] °the army of your Majesty [...], keep away from him; [...]

Since the rest of the inscription is only fragmentarily preserved, the historical content is difficult to interpret. Nevertheless, this stele of Apries is the only Egyptian testimony of a campaign undertaken by Apries against Nebuchadnezzar or one of his allies in the southern Levant. It appears that this campaign was considered victorious, since a defeat would not be the subject of a commemorative stele.

A few remarks on this important text are in order. First, the campaign is dated to »the year 7« of Pharaoh Apries which could be dated to the year 583/2 BCE.⁴⁶ The second specification *IV Šmw* »the fourth month of summer« refers to the last month of the »Season of the Harvest« and might be related approximately to August/September. Therefore, the campaign started in August 583 BCE. The sentence »taking the road eastward to its limit« (l.4) means that Apries obviously crosses the Sinai peninsula by the coastal road. In this way, he shifts the scene of the conflict outside Egypt to the southern Levant.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the Pharaoh is personally involved in forming an army of Egyptians and foreigners (l.4–5). He is also concerned about the appointment of troop commanders and the protection of the country (l.6), including whether this protection consisted of fortifications or alliances with neighbouring countries.

The initiative for the conflict commemorated by this stele clearly belongs to Apries. Perhaps Apries received information of a Babylonian plan to attack Egypt, to which the king responded by preparing for the war himself. Furthermore, he moved the place of battle out of the country, an initiative expressed in the idiom »he made the place of battle favourable to him« (l.5). The mentioning of *nbd-qd* (l.6) could be interpreted as a toponym *qd(j)* referring to the region between the Gulf of Issos and Karkemish. The toponym *qd(j)* may have been an ancient name for Kizzuwatna in south-eastern Anatolia in the plains of Cilicia.⁴⁸ However, it is debatable whether this old toponym was still used in the Saïte period. Perhaps the transliteration *nbd-qd* could also be translated as »one bad in character« referring to

⁴⁶ According to Leo Depuydt, »Saïte and Persian Egypt, 664 BC–332 BC (Dyns. 26–31, Psammetichus I to Alexander's Conquest of Egypt),« in *Ancient Egyptian Chronology*, ed. E. Hornung et al., HdO I/83 (Leiden: Brill, 2006) 265–283: 275 this is the time period 16th January 583–15th January 582 BCE.

⁴⁷ See Abd el-Maksoud and Valbelle, »Stèle«: 9.

⁴⁸ See Wolfgang Helck, *Die Beziehungen Ägyptens zu Vorderasien im 3. und 2. Jahrhundert*, Ägyptologische Abhandlungen 5 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, ²1971), 281 f. For this toponym see also Abd el-Maksoud and Valbelle, »Stèle«: 6 f.

any rebel, either to Nebuchadnezzar or to one of his allies or to a former Egyptian vassal in the Near East who has thrown off political dependence.⁴⁹

The rest of the fragmentary text is difficult to understand. Most probably the pharaoh received some information about the enemy army (1.7–9). The idiom »to conceal his action«, associated with »the prince« and the notion of an embassy from the hostile *nbd-qd*, implies a diplomatic feint planned by the Babylonians in the eastern Delta. Perhaps the Babylonians tried to use a desert road like Asarhaddon in 671 BCE to invade Egypt.⁵⁰ The underlying historical context would therefore be a planned Babylonian invasion of Egypt under the guise of an embassy, an action of which Apries would have become aware through a loyal informant and which he would have decided to foil by taking the fight somewhere east of Sinai.⁵¹

5 Conclusions

According to the newly found stele, Pharaoh Apries carried out an apparently victorious campaign in the Levant in 583/2 BCE. With this operation, he was able to preempt a planned invasion of Egypt and to defeat the enemy outside Egypt. Against this background, it is quite likely that Judah tried to throw off the hated vassal yoke and eliminate Babylonian domination. Even though there is no further source so far, it is highly probable that Nebuchadnezzar carried out a punitive expedition in the following year. In this case, a motive for the third deportation would be provided. The rebellious Judean elite that still remained in the country were consequently exiled to Babylon as well. It is possible that Jehoiachin was also imprisoned in Babylon in 582/1 BCE, as he was the only available Judean leader who had to bear the responsibility for his Judean compatriots. Perhaps even the contested campaign by Nebuchadnezzar against Transjordan and Egypt in 582/1 BCE might have been related to the former Egyptian attack mentioned by the victory stele, though this narrative of Josephus is not necessarily trustworthy, as shown above. However, against the background of this victory stele, Josephus's claim that Nebuchadnezzar

⁴⁹ Though the hieroglyphs read *nbd* »weave, coiffure«, the transcription must be *nbd* »bad« for there was often a depalatalisation of *d* > *d* since the Middle Kingdom. For both words see Adolf Erman, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache 2* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1992), 246 f. The idiom *nbd-qd* could be interpreted as adjective with defining noun »one bad in character« or »one with bad character«.

⁵⁰ For the Assyrian tactic see Karen Radner, »Esarhaddon's Expedition from Palestine to Egypt in 671 BCE. A Trek through Negev and Sinai,« in *Fundstellen: Gesammelte Schriften zur Archäologie und Geschichte Altvorderasiens ad honorem Hartmut Kühne*, ed. D. Bonatz et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008) 305–314: 305–311.

⁵¹ For this interpretation see also Abd el-Maksoud and Valbelle, »Stèle«: 12.

zar conquered and destroyed Egypt appears rather unlikely,⁵² though a limited invasion might be possible. Furthermore, a capture of Apries by the Babylonians is impossible, for Apries ruled until 570 BCE.⁵³

All things considered, the third deportation might be related to the campaign of Pharaoh Apries in the Levant in 583/2 BCE, a suspected revolt in Judah and Transjordan at that time or soon thereafter, and a probable counterattack of Nebuchadnezzar in 582/1 BCE. In contrast, the often-assumed connection of the third deportation to the assassination of Gedaliah is rather far-fetched, especially since Gedaliah was presumably neither a vassal king nor ruled in Judah for a long time. The Egyptian campaign in the Levant is a much better scenario for the subsequent punitive actions by the Babylonians.

Abstract: The Babylonian period in the Levant must be reconstructed mainly from sparse information found in the Bible. This data is often theologically overpainted, making it difficult to grasp the historical core. The third deportation of Judah in 582 BCE mentioned in Jer 52:30 is difficult to link to a historical event. It has often been assumed that the assassination of Gedaliah was the reason for the deportation. A newly found stele of Pharaoh Apries offers an alternative explanation, as it provides a possible background for the third deportation and perhaps also for the imprisonment of Jehoiachin.

Keywords: Jer 52:28–30; Josephus; Gedaliah; Apries; Nebuchadnezzar

Zusammenfassung: Die babylonische Zeit in der Levante muss hauptsächlich aus den spärlichen Informationen der Bibel rekonstruiert werden. Diese Daten sind oft theologisch übermalt, so dass es schwierig ist, den historischen Kern zu erfassen. Die in Jer 52,30 erwähnte dritte Deportation Judas im Jahr 582 v. Chr. lässt sich nur schwer mit einem historischen Ereignis in Verbindung bringen. Oft wurde angenommen, dass die Ermordung Gedaljas der Grund hierfür war. Eine neu gefundene Stele von Pharao Apries kann diese Lücke füllen, da sie einen Grund für die dritte Deportation und vielleicht auch für die Gefangenschaft Jojachins liefert.

Schlagwörter: Jer 52,28–30; Josephus; Gedalja; Apries; Nebukadnezar

⁵² Therefore, the prophecy of Jeremiah referring to a major Babylonian strike (Jer 46:13–26) cannot be confirmed by other data.

⁵³ See also Lester L. Grabbe, »The Lying Pen of the Scribes? Jeremiah and History,« in *Essays on Ancient Israel in Its Near Eastern Context. FS N. Na'aman*, ed. Y. Amit (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006) 189–204: 199.

Résumé: L'époque babylonienne dans le Levant doit être reconstruite principalement à partir des rares informations trouvées dans la Bible. Ces données sont souvent teintées de théologie, ce qui rend difficile la compréhension de l'essentiel de l'histoire. La troisième déportation de Juda en 582 avant notre ère, mentionnée en Jérémie 52,30, est difficile à relier à un événement historique. L'hypothèse usuelle est que l'assassinat de Guedalias serait la raison de cette déportation.

Une stèle du pharaon Apriès récemment découverte offre une autre explication, en donnant un contexte possible pour la troisième déportation et peut-être aussi pour l'emprisonnement de Yoyakîn.

Mots-clés: Jr 52,28–30; Flavius Josèphe; Guedalias; Apriès; Nabuchodonosor