

The Province of Yehud: the Vision and the Reality

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YEHUD MEDINTA was the Aramaic name given in the Persian period to the province of Judaea. It was founded by returnees from the Diaspora and constituted the nucleus which later developed into the extended Jewish settlement of the Second Temple era. We shall begin with a brief description of this province in its broader historical context, that is, its place in the royal Persian administration in general and in Persian Palestine in particular.

I

The Persian Empire succeeded that of Babylonia in 538 B.C.E. and ruled the area for some 200 years. Its government was quite stable, headed by an almost uninterrupted dynasty of kings. Nevertheless, an unusual phenomenon can be observed; in the course of its two centuries of rule, even in regions where its hegemony continued without break or disturbance, the Persian administration underwent thorough and frequent reorganization. These were not limited changes, but comprehensive reorganizations affecting wide administrative areas, i.e. the satrapies. A case in point is the well-known history of the fifth satrapy, which included the province of Yehud.¹

In the time of Cyrus (538-530 B.C.E.) the entire area that had been conquered from the Babylonians, including Babylon itself and the province called Beyond-the-River, were apparently united into a single satrapy ruled by the governor Gabaro (Gobrias). In the beginning of the reign of Darius I (522-486 B.C.E.), the imperial Persian administration was completely revamped. According to Herodotus (III, 95-98), the empire under Darius was redivided into twenty satrapies. In this division, Babylon was separated from Beyond-the-River and combined with Assyria as a single satrapy (the ninth), while Beyond-the-River (the fifth satrapy) included Syria, Phoenicia, Palestine, and Cyprus (III, 91).

This division, however, is not confirmed by extant epigraphic sources from the reign of Darius I. Three inscriptions preserved in Behistun, Persepolis, and Naqsh-e Rostem respectively, list the satrapies set up by Darius but do not mention the satrapy Beyond-

¹ On this satrapy, see A.F. Rainey, "The Satrapy 'Beyond the River'," *Australian Journal of Biblical Archaeology*, 1 (1969), 51-78.

the-River. The order of the satrapies according to the Behistun inscription is: 3—Babylon; 4—Assyria; 5—Arabia; 6—Egypt. This order is repeated in the inscription from Naqsh-i-Rustem (ll. 15-18), while the document from Persepolis reads: 3—Babylon; 4—Arabia; 5—Assyria; 6—Egypt.² This means that in the reign of Darius I, Beyond-the-River was still included in the more comprehensive area of "Babylon". We may thus conclude that the list of satrapies given by Herodotus postdated the reign of Darius I despite its earlier attribution. That is, it dates from the time of Xerxes I (486-465 B.C.E.), since Babylon was undoubtedly separated from Beyond-the-River only after the former's revolt against the Persians and consequent destruction in 482 B.C.E.³

In any event, there is no doubt that when Ezra and Nehemiah arrived in Judaea, circa 450, they already found the satrapy Beyond-the-River firmly established. Presumably the aforementioned changes were not the last. We know that in 400 B.C.E., when Egypt was liberated from the Persian yoke, additional changes must have been instituted, for the Egyptian armies entered and left Judaea unimpeded, encroaching upon the territory of this satrapy. Finally, on the coins of Mazdai (or Mazdi), one of the last governors of this region, the title was added: *zy 'al' abâr nahara whlk*, that is, "who (rules) over Beyond-the-River and Cilicia."⁴ Hence the Cilician coastal strip (the southern coastal region of Anatolia) may also have been annexed to this satrapy at the end of the Persian period.

The administrative changes introduced in the fifth satrapy are important for understanding the history of the province of Yehud. For if during so short a period such fundamental changes were effected in the overall administration, then in the more limited areas of internal satrapal bureaucracy one would also anticipate constant alterations in government, territorial modifications, and perhaps even more basic changes.

II

As to the political organization of Palestine, it is commonly agreed that upon conquering the land, the Persians found the area already divided into well-defined political units, thus inheriting a situation created at the time of the Assyrian and Babylonian conquests. Among those political units, the two provinces of Judaea and Samaria are most prominent, and we have abundant evidence confirming their existence. Zerubbabel was appointed the governor of Judaea and after him the title was also used in connection with Nehemiah. Elephantine documents tell us that the governor who succeeded him was named Bagohi, and a series of coins from Beth-Zur and Tel Jemmeh from the end of the Persian period mention *יחזקיי הפחה*, "Yehezqiyoh the governor".⁵ Moreover, Aharoni,

2 On provincial organization in the Persian empire, see K. Galling, "Syrien in der Politik der Achämaniden," *Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt für Palästina und Syrien*, 13 (1937), 138-140; O. Leuze, *Die Satrapieneinteilung in Syrien und im Zweistromlande* (Halle, 1935); A.J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, VII (Oxford, 1955), pp. 580-689; R.N. Frye, *The Heritage of Persia* (London, 1966), pp. 119-137.

3 On this revolt, see A.T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire* (Chicago, 1948), p. 237.

4 G.A. Cooke, *A Text-book of North-Semitic Inscriptions* (Oxford, 1903), p. 346.

5 L.Y. Rahmani, "Silver Coins of the Fourth Century B.C. from Tel Gamma," *IEJ* 21 (1971), 158-160.



Phh coins from Tell Jemmeh (r.) and Beth-Zur (l.)

Grintz, and Kutscher have suggested that the personal names on some of the seal impressions bearing the name of the province Yehud are names of Jewish governors from the fourth century B.C.E. (see below).⁶ Nor is there any doubt that a province of Samaria existed. Although Sanballat the Horonite, one of Nehemiah's enemies, is not mentioned as a governor, papyri discovered in the cave at Wadi Daliyeh bear a seal impression naming Sanballat (apparently a descendant of the Sanballat who was the contemporary of Nehemiah) with his full title: יהו בן סנבלט פחת שמרון "... Yahu son of Sanballat, governor of Samaria".⁷

Having established beyond doubt the existence of the provinces of Judaea and Samaria, we must still ask how the remaining areas of the country were organized during the Persian period. Avi-Yonah has suggested that Palestine at that time was divided into three different political frameworks.⁸ First, the national provinces whose borders coincided with the various ethnic concentrations located there: besides Judaea and Samaria there were also Megiddo, Ashdod, the Idumaeen region in the Hebron mountain area, Ammon, and Moab. The second framework consisted of the Phoenician commercial cities along the coast, and the third was the Arab tribal framework. Although one cannot deny that the Arab form of settlement was fundamentally tribal and the

6 Cf. Y. Aharoni, *Excavations at Ramat Rahel (1959-1960)* (Rome, 1962), pp. 38-41; J.M. Grintz, "Jehoezer—Unknown High Priest?" *JQR* 50 (1960), 338-345; Y. Kutscher, "'Pakhvah' and its Cognates" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 30 (1960), 112-119.

7 F.M. Cross, "The Discovery of the Samaria Papyri," *BA* 26 (1963), 110-121. Cf. also "Inscriptions Reveal," *Catalogue No. 100 of the Israel Museum* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1973), p. 149.

8 M. Avi-Yonah, *Carta's Atlas of the Period of the Second Temple: the Mishnah and the Talmud* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1966), p. 11.

Phoenicians' urban, it seems quite improbable that the Persian government would not find an urban organizational structure objectionable. It is difficult to imagine "free cities" in Palestine—when they were indeed subject to the king of Sidon, who was himself under the direct rule of the Persian governor residing at the palace located in his city. A unit of the Persian army was even located nearby. If the king of Sidon was so restricted, then obviously the political freedom enjoyed by the coastal towns purportedly subject to him is even more doubtful (this, of course, is apart from commercial rights).

The same holds true for the southern region, which is represented in the biblical account by the person of Geshem the Arab. Recent excavations have revealed a significant number of military strongholds scattered throughout the south, among them Tell Jemmeh, Tell Sera', Beer-Sheba, Arad, Kadash-Barnea, and Tell el Kheleifeh. The ostraca from most of these places show that army units were stationed there and at least some were organized by "standards", that is, the Persian military organization familiar to us from the Elephantine papyri.⁹ It is thus inconceivable that the area was exclusively under Arab tribal rule, without a Persian provincial government.

For purposes of political administration Persian Palestine was probably divided into provinces, each with its own dynasty of rulers. The dynasty was usually indigenous, Samaritan in Samaria (according to the Wadi Daliyeh papyri) and Arab in the south (according to the dedicatory inscriptions found at Tel el-Maskhuta).¹⁰ This was apparently the situation in Judaea as well judging from the biblical evidence and the coins of Yehezqiyo. Each province established a governor's court, miniature imitations of those held by the higher rulers, and in this way administered the region. Such a provincial official was the *sgn'*, "prefect," mentioned in the Bible and the Wadi Daliyeh documents. Most likely they also had a military unit at their disposal and the authority to make their own seals. At any rate, archaeological finds include local seal impressions belonging solely to one province or another. Apparently they were also authorized to mint small silver coins, now called "Palestinian coins". Within this comprehensive political framework Judaea (Yehud) was an ordinary province no different from the others in Persian Palestine; it had a governor and a bureaucracy, its borders were congruent with those of the Jewish settlements and it was authorized to mint coins, seals, and the like.

III

Yet the province of Yehud poses a problem. When was the province officially founded and from when can we trace its history? Zerubbabel had indeed been called governor and possibly his predecessor, Sheshbazzar, as well. That is, descendants of the house of David were also the first governors, and perhaps we may hypothesize that early in the

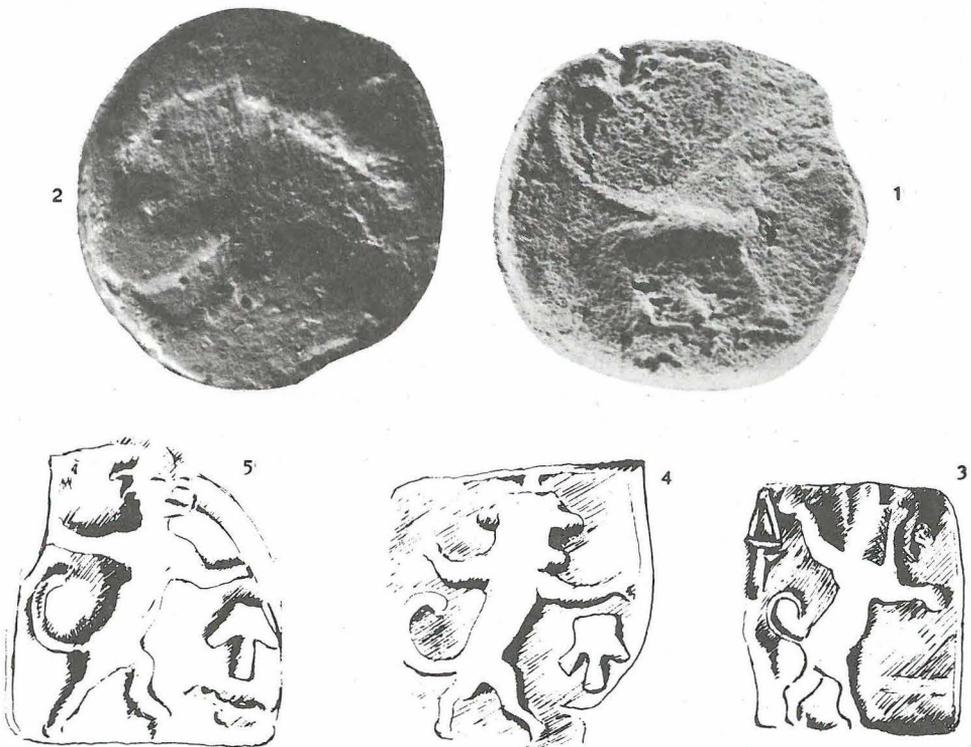
9 Y. Naveh, "The Aramaic Ostraca from Tel Arad," in Y. Aharoni, *The Arad Inscriptions* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1976), esp. pp. 175-176.

10 I. Rabinowitz, "Aramaic Inscriptions of the Fifth Century B.C.E. from a North-Arab Shrine in Egypt," *JNES* 15 (1956), 1-9.

Restoration period some kind of an attempt was made to found a province. But during the entire period from 515 to 445 B.C.E., from the end of the biblical account concerning Zerubbabel to the arrival of Ezra and Nehemiah in Jerusalem, we possess no sources attesting to the establishment of a provincial administration in Judaea. Moreover, when Nehemiah arrived in Judaea, he seems to have encountered a political vacuum with no government. Nor is there mention of any governor whom Nehemiah came to succeed. For this reason, we are obliged to hypothesize that even if there was an attempt to establish a Judaeian province at the beginning of the Persian period, it was short-lived.

Parallel to the historical data, the material culture, as evidenced in excavations of the early period of the province, has produced only two types of seal impressions which might have a bearing on our subject.

The first type includes completely neutral impressions bearing the name *Moza*, that is, only the name of a settlement. These tell us nothing about the existence of the province. The interesting aspect of these impressions is their continuity from the Babylonian period. Avigad published an impression from the Babylonian period mentioning that very settlement, *ha-Moza*. From the same period we also know of impressions bearing the name



Seal impressions bearing animal forms 1. Lion, from En-Gedi 2. Bust of a lion, from Ramat-Raḥel 3. Lion, from Gibeon 4,5. Lions, from Ramat-Raḥel

Gibeon, also a nearby settlement.¹¹ Both are apparently instances of commercial markings, which, however, contribute little to our subject.

On the other hand, the second type of seal impressions prevalent in Judaea at the beginning of the Persian period at approximately the time of Nehemiah, are of some importance. They depict various animals, mainly lions, but also such pagan motifs as the Persian fire-altar. A comparison with seals used throughout the Persian Empire from Persepolis to Egypt shows these impressions are clearly an organic part of the corpus of seals common in Achaemenian archives, despite the local-provincial execution on the impressions from Judaea.¹² Archaeological finds from this period have thus produced nothing that distinguishes Judaea from the other provinces either of Persian Palestine or of the Persian Empire in general. Both historically and archaeologically, therefore, we possess no evidence attesting to a separate Judean province in the early Persian period.

The situation differs when we come to the second half of the period, from the mid-fifth century onwards. Numerous and varied seal impressions suddenly appear, all bearing the name of the province Yehud, sometimes the Aramaic name in full, but also various abbreviations: *Yhd.* *Yh.* etc. Some inscriptions appear in Aramaic script, others in Hebrew script.¹³

In addition to seal impressions there are coins bearing the name of the province. These coins begin to appear, seemingly together with the seals or shortly thereafter, at the end of the fifth century onwards, although most belong to the last decades of the Persian period. This unique phenomenon seems to be one of the cases in which archaeologists, unable to explain the find, can but note it. For if indeed some eight different provinces existed in Persian Palestine — in our estimation a virtual certainty — then why is Yehud and not, for example, Samaria the only province whose name is indicated on its coins and seals? This may be seen as an assertion of prominence, echoing a kind of renewed national pride, very unusual among the “provinces” of the Persian satrapal administration. In all events, the change from early seals in the usual Achaemenian style to coins so explicitly mentioning the province of Yehud, in my opinion, is striking evidence of the reorganization that took place in the Judean government. This may represent a revival of the province, if not its re-establishment. Of relevance in this context is the theory by Alt that in the early Persian period Judaea was subordinate to Samaria, and functioned as an independent province only from the time of Nehemiah. In fact, Alt opines that the embitterment of the Samaritans and their opposition to Nehemiah, resulted from the revocation of their privileges in the face of Judaea’s gains.¹⁴

11 On the ‘*Moza*’ impressions, see N. Avigad, “New Light on the MSH Seal Impressions,” *IEJ* 8 (1958), 113-119; idem. “Two Hebrew Inscriptions on Wine-Jars,” *IEJ* 22 (1972), 5-9. On the ‘Gibeon’ impressions, see J.B. Pritchard, *Hebrew Inscriptions and Stamps from Gibeon* (Philadelphia, 1959).

12 E. Stern, “Seal Impressions in the Achaemenid Style in the Province of Judah,” *BASOR* 202 (1971), 6-16.

13 On the ‘Yehud’ seals, see most recently F.M. Cross, “Judean Stamps,” *Eretz Israel* 9 (1969), 20*-27* (and bibliography there). It seems, however, that only the Aramaic impressions are from the Persian period, while the Hebrew impressions are from the Hellenistic period.

14 A. Alt, *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, II (München, 1953), pp. 316-337.

IV

We shall now describe briefly the character of the province of Yehud, as reflected both in the Bible and in archaeological data.

The dominant factor was the close bond between the province in the Persian period and the former kingdom of Judah in pre-Exilic times. It reflects a striving to establish continuity with this kingdom and to skip over the intervening period, an attitude expressed in several biblical passages, and illustrated in the matter of provincial borders. Five lists pertaining to the borders of the province have been preserved in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Four, quite realistically reflect the actual borders of the province of Yehud, and are discussed below.

By contrast, the list of Jerusalem residents in Nehemiah 11, or at least its beginning, is very strange. The list commences with a series of settlements undoubtedly not within the borders of the Judaean province during the Persian period. It mentions men of Judah living in their courtyards and fields, and lists such distant places as Ziklag and its villages, Beer-Sheba and its villages, and another eight settlements in the Beer-Sheba region. Next a city in the southern Hebron hills is listed — Hebron, not by its usual name but rather by the archaic Kiryat-Arb'a. Lachish is also mentioned as the only city in the southern Shefela region. This city as well did not belong to the province of Yehud. Finally a strange concluding verse mentions the border from Beer-Sheba to Gehinnom, that is, the very borders of the kingdom of Judah in its last years.

The central problem arising here is the date of the list. Some, like Aharoni and Kallai, date it to the end of the kingdom of Judah, and consider it a list of peripheral settlements whose residents were not exiled. Hence this area to all intents and purposes remained Jewish in the succeeding period as well.¹⁵ This, however, is problematic. New and important archaeological evidence enables us to trace the progress of Edomite settlement in the Negev with a great degree of certainty. Excavations by Nelson Glueck at Tel el Kheleifeh near Eilat have shown that Edomites were already living on the site in the seventh century B.C.E. (stratum IV).¹⁶ But we might assume that this was a distant site. However, recent excavations conducted by Kochavi in Tel Malhata near Beer-Sheba uncovered many Edomite potsherds from the final years preceding the destruction of the First Temple, correctly interpreted by the excavator as indicating that Edomites were already living on that site too.¹⁷ Another piece of evidence may be added conjecturally; an ostrakon discovered in Arad and attributed to the seventh century warns residents of the

15 See also Y. Aharoni, *The Land of Israel in the Biblical Period* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1963), pp. 333-338; Z. Kallai, *The Northern Boundaries of Judah* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1960), pp. 82-94 and bibliography there.

16 See also N. Glueck, *The Other Side of the Jordan* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1954).

17 See also M. Kochavi, "The First Season of Excavations at Tel Malhata," (Hebrew), *Qadmoniot* 3 (1970), 23-24. On this subject we should add that in 1976 a great deal of Edomite material was also uncovered in the excavations at Aro'er near Tel Malhata. The find has not yet been published; I wish to thank Prof. A. Biran for this information.



Yehud coin. One side shows the head of a bearded man wearing a plumed Corinthian helmet. The obverse shows a bearded man sitting in a winged chariot. In his left hand he holds a hawk; to his right is a mask. Three letters, *yhd*, in a line with the head.

Jewish fortresses in Arad, Kinah and Ramot in the Negev of an Edomite attack.¹⁸ That is, the Beer-Sheba region which included these settlements seems precisely the first one the Edomites intended to take over.

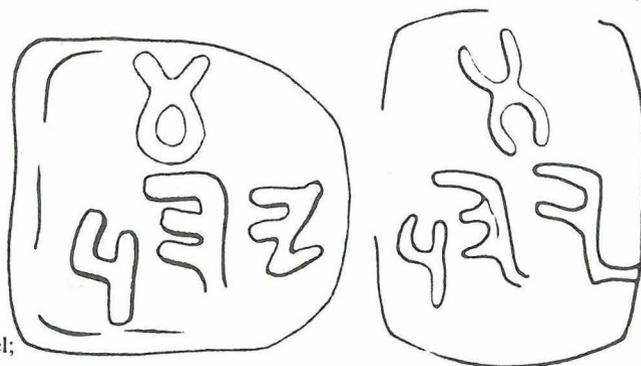
On the other hand, some investigators ascribe the list in Nehemiah 11 to the Hellenistic period, contending that it reflects Hasmonean times. This suggestion also seems unlikely. It is evident from the earliest Hellenistic documents we possess — the Zenon papyri from the mid-third century B.C.E. — that the city of Maresha near Lachish was already at that time a purely Edomite city. Moreover, according to this source the two main cities in this part of the country, Maresha and Adoraim (not Hebron), were both settled by Edomites. What is more, all the additional evidence from the Hasmonean period indicating the direction in which Jewish settlements expanded points northward. In 145 B.C.E., for example, when the districts of Lod, Ramataim, and Ophra were annexed to Judaea they were already settled by Jews.

If the list dates neither from the end of the First Temple period, nor from the Hellenistic era, and if, as noted, the borders cited do not coincide with those of the Judaeen province in the Persian period, it seems a logical conclusion that this list dates

18 Y. Aharoni, "Three Hebrew Ostraca from Arad" (Hebrew), *Eretz Israel* 9 (1969), 10-15; see also idem., *The Arad Inscriptions* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 48-51.

from an earlier period, perhaps the end of the eighth or beginning of the seventh century B.C.E. It is quoted in the book of Nehemiah not as an actual list but rather as a utopian plan showing where a Judaeans should settle upon returning from exile, within the ancient borders from Beer-Sheba to Jerusalem, the classical territory apportioned to the tribe of Judah. In a utopian plan associating men of Judah with their historical inheritance there was no need to consider current political configurations.

Returning to the archaeological data, we find that here, too, the evidence seems very clearly to indicate the attempt to create a continuity and bond with the ancient kingdom of Judah. We shall cite a number of examples, all related to seal impressions. Among the impressions bearing the name of the province Yehud, we also find some with added national symbols commonly used towards the end of the former kingdom of Judah. Most outstanding is the letter *'ayin* (𐤀), appearing on "shekel" weights of the kingdom of Judah. This has long been explained as a schematic form of the scarab, one of the emblems of the kingdom of Judah.¹⁹ In another group of impressions, discovered in Ramat-Raḥel and Gibeon and attributed to the Persian period, the rosette, the latest emblem of the kingdom of Judah, appears repeatedly.²⁰



Seal impressions from Ramat-Raḥel;
yhd with the symbol 𐤀

Weights are another prominent expression of national identification where we witness the return of names used in the First Temple period. We possess weights with the name *pym* incised in the Aramaic letters characteristic of the Persian period. Reifenberg published a coin bearing the inscription *bq'*. This means that alongside the usual weights common in the Persian period—that is, Achaemenian, Greek, Phoenician and others—there was apparently an attempt to reinstate the system of weights employed in the First Temple period, if not according to the original standards, at least using early names.

19 Y. Yadin, "Ancient Judaeans Weights and the Date of the Samaria Ostraca," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 8 (1961), 9-17.

20 Y. Aharoni (above, n. 6), I, 35; II, 22; plates 19:11; 41:12.



Stone weight from Tell-Shuqaf, inscribed *pym*

However, the most important expression of the attempt to span the lapse of time between the kingdom of Judah and the province of Yehud is, in our opinion, the reinstatement of ancient Hebrew script. Although several scholars, like Cross and Naveh, usually attribute this phenomenon to the Hellenistic period, it seems to have begun already in the Persian period. This script appears already on 'Yehud' and provincial coins universally dated to the fourth century B.C.E. In other words, the first step in the reinstatement of the Hebrew script was taken already at that time. The affinity with the kingdom of Judah and the desire to reestablish its former boundaries and glory are most apparent.

V

In contrast, upon examining the actual borders of the province of Yehud according to both the biblical lists and the archaeological data, a completely different picture emerges.

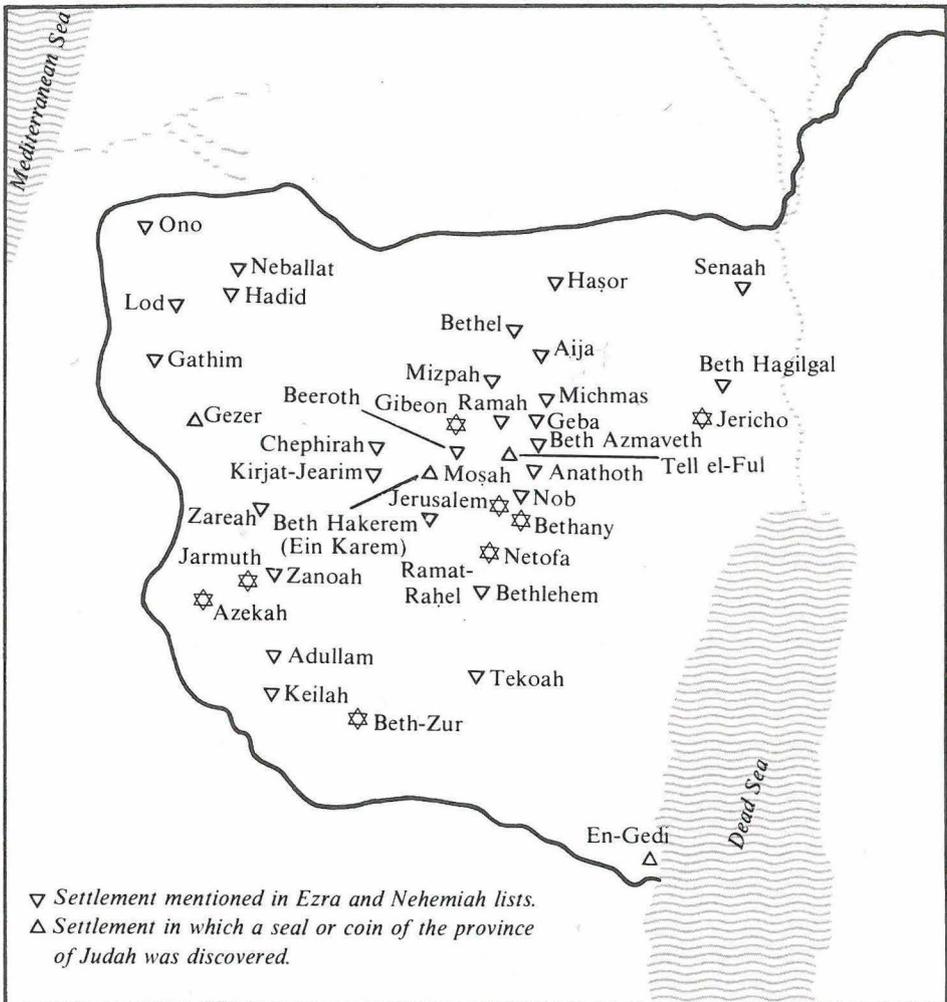
The books of Ezra and Nehemiah, as noted, preserve five lists enumerating names of settlements, one of which we have already discussed.²¹ The present framework precludes discussing all of them in detail. Suffice it to say that these lists differ significantly from each other, containing various additions and omissions. Yet many of the same names are repeated, and basically the groups of settlements they mention all belong to five contiguous regions, creating a clear territorial continuity. The regions are: the inheritance of Benjamin, the Jordan Valley along the Jericho-Ein-Gedi line, the Judaeian hill country from Jerusalem to Beth-Zur, and two units in the Shefela, one later called the Lod

21 The list in Nehemiah 11 has already been mentioned; for the other four lists, see Ezra 2; Nehemiah 3, 7, 12.

district, the second, to its south, the Adullam region. Since we lack any comprehensive list defining precisely the borders of the province of Yehud, it is not surprising that opinions differ and controversies rage over the date and meaning of each of these partial lists of settlements given in Ezra and Nehemiah. Yet they all seem to belong to the Persian period and complement one another.

In any case two new criteria have recently developed for reexamining the reliability of the biblical lists and for sketching quite precisely the borders of the province of Yehud. Both criteria are archaeological.

The first criterion is the area of the distribution of the seal impressions and coins of Yehud. Without going into great detail, it becomes clear that the southern limit of the



area of distribution is Beth-Zur; the northern limit Tel en-Nasbeh; Jericho and Ein-Gedi are the limits in the east, and Gezer in the west. (We should also mention the impressions bearing the inscription *yrshlm*, Jerusalem, inscribed in Hebrew script. Although from the Hellenistic period, these impressions are clearly a product of the autonomous Jewish government and thus may serve as evidence regarding the earlier period. Indeed, two impressions of this type were also discovered in Tel Yarmuth and Tel 'Azeqa, that is, in the Adullam region.)²² This means that the limits of distribution of such finds—bearing the seal of the Persian province of Yehud—almost completely coincide with the boundaries as described in the various lists of Ezra and Nehemiah.

However, we can also reexamine this matter in light of a second and relatively new criterion: the results of surveys conducted recently in the Adullam region by Rahmani and in the Hebron hills by Kochavi.²³ From these two surveys emerged a clear line of border fortresses of the Yehud province, in the west facing the province of Ashdod and in the south facing the southern Hebron mountain region settled, as noted, by Edomites. Regarding the western line, we have already mentioned Yarmuth, 'Azeqa, and Adullam. A fortress was discovered close to Adullam in Ḥirbet a-Rasem. Ḥ. Abu-Twain, was excavated by A. Mazar, and there is of course Beth-Zur which was excavated in the 1930s. Albright already interpreted the first stratum of this fortress as a Judaeian defensive fortification against Edom from the Persian period.²⁴ This fortress was restored in the time of Judah Maccabee for the same purpose. In the Beth-Zur region and east of it in the direction of Ein-Gedi, the fortresses discovered are Ḥ. el-Qat and Ḥ. Zawayeh. This list includes only the main fortresses, and it means that we now possess an almost continuous line of smaller fortresses from the Persian period demarcating the southern and western borders of the province of Yehud. These coincide with the borders indicated by the biblical lists and seal impressions. Hence, according to all available sources, the borders of the province of Yehud were small, far more limited than the utopian borders of the kingdom of Judah for which the first returnees from exile wished or hoped.

VI

We now turn to two characteristic features of the material culture of the province of Yehud. Here we can but allude to the issues, for the present context precludes the extensive treatment they deserve.

The first characteristic is the striking difference between the material culture of Judaea in the early Persian period (the fifth century, before the founding of the province), and the second period (from its founding to the Greek conquest).

An examination of finds from the first period reveals a kind of continuity and traditionalism, an attempt of sorts, whether intentional or chance, to preserve the

22 N. Avigad, "More Evidence on the Judaeian Post-Exilic Stamps," *IEJ* 24 (1974), 51-58; H.N. Richardson, "A Stamped Handle from Khirbet Yarmuk," *BASOR* 192 (1968), 12-16.

23 L.Y. Rahmani, "A Partial Survey of the Adulam Area," (Hebrew) *Yediot* 28 (1964), 215-218; M. Kochavi, *Judah, Samaria and the Golan; An Archaeological Survey in 1968* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1974), p. 23.

24 W.F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine* (Harmondsworth, 1960), p. 152.

material culture of the Israelite period. There is, for example, a distinct continuity in the quality and type of clay vases. The same holds true for other finds. There was thus a great difference at that time between the material culture of the Judaeen hill country and that of the Shefela region, which was set in an entirely different political and social context. On the other hand, by the end of the fifth century and beginning of the fourth century B.C.E. the wall of Judaeen isolation seems to have been breached. A greater openness to the outside world and the international culture of the coastal region — primarily Greek — dominated Yehud as well. Although but conjectural, it is possible that once the state was created and firmly established, its leaders began to imitate the customs of their neighbors, a kind of incipient Hellenization.

Yet these changes found expression in everyday objects only. There was still a fundamental difference between the province of Yehud and its neighbors in the Persian period. However, Yehud also differed from its predecessor, the kingdom of Judah, and this with regard to cultic matters.

Towards the end of the kingdom of Judah we find in every Judaeen city excavated, including Jerusalem itself, a considerable number of figurines commonly assumed to have been used in the popular cult. On the other hand, from the Persian period we know of several remains of sanctuaries as well as thirteen groups of cultic vessels, all from either the Galilee or Shefela regions, which were settled by foreigners. The many excavations carried out in sites within the boundaries of the Yehud province as delineated above, have not yielded even one artifact which could be interpreted as a cultic figurine, a fact of great significance.

The province of Yehud was founded only at the end of the fifth century B.C.E. Its founders regarded the kingdom of Judah as the model for their national revival, in terms of boundaries, spiritual life and material culture. Yet when we examine the reality in light of the written sources and especially the archaeological data, it becomes evident that Yehud was quite different: its boundaries were far more limited than those of the kingdom of Judah, and even more important, with the exception of the cultic dimension, the new province adapted itself in everyday life to its environment. In the course of this period Yehud lost much of its uniqueness, and was eventually overwhelmed by a foreign culture, that of the Greeks.²⁵

25 Two very important groups of finds relevant to our subject have recently been published. One is a group of coins on which *Yhdh* (Judaea) is written in Hebrew. It includes a coin of Ptolemy I (301-285 B.C.E.). This find clearly attests that Judaea continued to exist as an independent administrative unit at the beginning of the Hellenistic period. (See also A. Kindler, "Silver Coins Bearing the Name of Judea from the Early Hellenistic Period," *IEJ* 24 (1974), 73-76; D. Jesselsohn, "A New Coin Type with Hebrew Inscription," *ibid.*, 77-78.) The second assemblage consists of bullae and seals, inscribed in Aramaic, from the Restoration period. They have been published by N. Avigad, "Bullae and Seals from a Post-Exilic Judean Archive," *Qedem* 4 (1976). It is generally agreed that this very important find solves the problem of the meaning of the *phw'* (i.e. the governor) inscription. Now we definitely know the names of three other Jewish governors from the Persian period. The remaining question is when these governors ruled. Was it in the first part of the period, i.e. from the time of Zerubbabel to the time of Nehemiah, as Avigad thinks? Or did they follow Nehemiah's governorship, as is the opinion of the author? I shall deal with this issue in detail elsewhere.