son, and after a short time, was almost entirely reversed. They rebuilt every destroyed town, sending in large numbers of new people from other lands, on a scale not often seen in the long history of Palestine. This is a phenomenon still awaiting proper study. The rebuilding of Megiddo Stratum III, Dor, Dothan, and many other towns in a relatively short time completely changed the character of the desolated country. The Babylonians, on the contrary, left the country as it was during the initial phase of their domination, after they deliberately destroyed, burned, and robbed all the settlements they occupied. They also deported those not killed to Babylon. The Babylonian authorities never built anything. It was mainly the destruction of the country's major harbor towns along the coast that immediately affected international trade relations and the economic situation of the rest of the country in general, including the previous Assyrian provinces, which were probably under their direct rule, reducing them to poverty.

The major conclusion of this discussion is that in the archaeology of Palestine, there is virtually no clearly defined period that may be called "Babylonian," for it was a time from which almost no material finds remain. This means that the country was populated, and there were settlements, but that the population was very small in number, and that large parts of the towns and villages were either completely or partly destroyed, and the rest were poorly functioning. International trade virtually ceased. Only two regions appear to have been spared this fate: the northern part of Judah, i.e., the region of Benjamin, which did not suffer terribly from the Babylonians and exhibits signs of relative prosperity; and probably the land of Ammon, a region that still awaits further investigation.

· BOOK THREE ·

THE PERSIAN PERIOD

(539–332 BCE)

Introduction: The History of Palestine in the Persian Period

When in 539 BCE Babylon fell to Cyrus, the Achaemenid king of Persia (559–530 BCE), Persia was raised to the status of an empire comprising the entire Near East. In contrast to the Babylonians, whose rule had been based upon large-scale deportations of people and a reign of fear, Cyrus, from the outset, adopted a much more lenient policy. This included resettling exiles in their homelands, reconstructing their temples, and fostering the image of a liberator. This policy gained him the goodwill of most of the subject peoples in his empire.

Within the framework of this policy, Cyrus issued a proclamation to the Jewish exiles in Babylon urging them to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their Temple there. The first Jews to return from Babylon, headed by Sheshbazzar "the prince of Judah" (apparently Shenazzar the son of Jehoiachin, the former king of Judah), encountered numerous difficulties in their attempt to reestablish the national and religious center of the Jewish people. On arrival they found, on the outskirts of the ruined city, a small community that had continued to dwell in the largely desolate land after the destruction of the First Temple. This remnant and the neighboring Samaritans, Ashdodites, Edomites, and Arabs did not view the repatriates with favor and used all means in their power to obstruct them. They finally succeeded in putting an end to their building activities in Jerusalem.

Throughout this period, Cyrus was engaged in military expeditions in order to consolidate the borders of his new empire. He fell in battle in 530 BCE in the area east of the Caspian Sea.

Cyrus was succeeded by his son Cambyses II (530–522 BCE), whose chief accomplishment was his conquest of Egypt and its annexation to the

Achaemenid empire in 525 BCE. He assembled his troops in Acco and achieved victory with the help of Arabian-Qedarite tribes, which supplied the Persian army with water during its advance across the Sinai desert. In 522 BCE, when Cambyses was still in Egypt, a revolt broke out in Persia. The king set out to suppress it but died on the way home.

The death of Cambyses was followed by a series of revolts in Persia and a power struggle for the throne which was finally won by Darius I (522–486 BCE), also a member of the Achaemenid royal family, even though of a collateral line, and not a direct descendant of Cyrus. His assumption of the kingship provoked widespread rebellions throughout the vast empire. The first uprising took place in Elam and was swiftly quelled. Another rebellion broke out in Babylon, led by Nebuchadnezzar III the son of Nabonidus, last of the Babylonian kings (see above). Darius quelled this rebellion as well, and by 519 BCE he seems to have pacified the entire kingdom, strengthened his rule, and even extended his empire to hitherto unknown frontiers by annexing parts of India and eastern Europe. During the rest of his reign, he waged wars mainly on the western border, in Anatolia and in Greece. In 512 BCE, he crossed the Bosphorus and conquered Thrace. According to Herodotus, he also engaged the Scythians in battle at the mouth of the Danube.

Of major importance for the future of the Persian Empire was the rebellion of the Greek cities of Anatolia and Cyprus in 499 BCE. Although it was put down harshly, it brought about a major confrontation between the Persians and the Athenians. The hostilities continued over a long period of time and ended in the complete rout of the Persian army at the battle of Marathon in 490 BCE. This was the Persians' first serious defeat. According to Herodotus, Darius intended to wage a further war against Greece, but in 486 BCE an uprising led by the Egyptian ruler Khabasha took place in Egypt and Darius died during the preparations for a campaign against the Egyptians.

The main accomplishments of Darius' reign were in the realm of imperial administration. He consolidated the empire, which during his lifetime reached the largest extent ever attained by any empire in the Near East. He organized it into twenty satrapies, and, in order to maintain efficient control over even the most remote governors in the realm, he developed a sophisticated road and postal system. He also exercised control over the activities of the governors and took the Persian armies out of their jurisdiction. Darius carried out a reform of the laws in the different satrapies and initiated a new system of tax collection and also an efficient administrative organization. His name is likewise connected with the new imperial monetary unit—the daric.

The king also devoted much effort to large-scale building projects. The main palaces in the capitals of the empire are attributed to his reign.

In the early days of Darius' reign, there was a steady increase in the stream of refugees returning to Palestine from the Babylonian exile. Some historians regard the great turmoil in Babylon caused by the revolts of Nebuchadnezzar III (522 BCE) and Nebuchadnezzar IV (521 BCE), descendants of the royal Babylonian family, which were suppressed with great cruelty, as one of the reasons for the large number of returning exiles. Another possible factor was the economic crisis that followed in the wake of the revolts. The repatriates may also have been encouraged by Darius' new imperial organization. Judah appears to have been constituted as an independent "state" (Heb. *medinah*) for the short period during which Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and grandson of Jehoiachin served as a governor *(peḥa)* of the province by Darius' appointment. In any event, the Bible records that 42,360 persons returned to Judah from Babylon in those days. They included a large number of priests headed by Jeshua son of Jozadak, high priest of the house of Zadok. Darius ordered removal of all obstacles placed in the way of the returning exiles by the enemies of Judah. The king reaffirmed Cyrus' edict in a letter to Tattenai, the governor of the Abar Nahara (Beyond the River) satrapy. In the second year of Darius' reign, Zerubbabel began to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem with the support of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Zerubbabel developed commercial relations with the Phoenicians, who, through the port of Jaffa, supplied him—as they had Solomon—with cedars of Lebanon for the reconstruction of the Temple.

For some unknown reason, perhaps because Darius suspected that Zerubbabel was plotting an uprising, the governor—last heir of the Davidic line—disappeared suddenly, only a short time after construction work began. How the Jewish community was governed thereafter is unknown. N. Avigad may be correct in suggesting that another Jewish governor—Elnathan—replaced Zerubbabel. In the opinion of the present writer, however, the province may have been ruled by Persian governors from their seat in Samaria. A third possibility is that the leadership of the community passed to the priests and the landed oligarchy. Nevertheless, by 515 BCE the reconstruction of the Temple was complete and Jerusalem again assumed its position as the sacred center.

In 486 BCE, the year of the death of Darius I and the accession to the throne of his son Xerxes I (486–465 BCE), another revolt broke out in Egypt, led by the same Egyptian ruler, Khabasha. The revolt was crushed with diffi-

culty and after heavy fighting in 483 BCE. Some authorities believe that the letter of "accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem" (Ezra 4:6) was written at this time and that it was in some way connected with the Egyptian insurrection. At the end of the same year, another revolt broke out in Babylon in which the Persian satrap of Babylon and Abar Nahara, Zopyrus, was killed. Xerxes suppressed the rebellion and severely punished the rebels. Babylon was henceforth separated from the Abar Nahara satrapy, which then appears as an independent unit.

In 480 BCE, Xerxes undertook an expedition against the Greeks and suffered major defeats in the famous battles of Salamis and Mycale. The Greek campaign ended when the Persian fleet was totally destroyed in the battle of Eurymedon, and the Persians appear to have been driven out of the Aegean basin.

After his defeat, Xerxes retired to his palace and was murdered several years later by his vizier, Artabanus. Xerxes' son Artaxerxes I Longimanus (465/4–424/3 BCE) succeeded him on the throne after a short struggle with other candidates of the royal family. As a result, the Egyptians again rose in rebellion, this time led by Inaros the son of Psamtik, aided by an Athenian fleet. Only after a prolonged effort were Megabyzus, satrap of Abar Nahara, and Arsames, satrap of Egypt, able to crush the rebellion (455 BCE). They also destroyed the Athenian army, which had failed in its siege of Kition in Cyprus. In 448 BCE, Megabyzus himself rebelled against the Persian king with the support of his two sons, Zopyrus and Artyphius. Although Megabyzus later expressed regret for his action, he was nevertheless removed from his post.

In Judah, the time from the death of Darius I to the death of Artaxerxes I may be characterized as a period of expansion and population growth. Owing to the lack of strong leadership, the national and religious laws were no longer observed: intermarriage undermined the religious and national uniqueness of the Jewish community, and farmers were harshly oppressed by the landed oligarchy. Conditions changed when Artaxerxes I attained the throne. A new wave of Jews from Babylon left to resettle in Palestine, this time headed by a strong religious and political leadership. According to the biblical sources, Ezra, the priest and scribe, left Babylon in the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes (458 BCE). Artaxerxes had appointed him to repair the Temple and to establish the laws of the Torah as the religious and social authority of the Jewish community. His plans collapsed, however, when confronted with the problem of intermarriage and the enmity of the local Jews and their neighbors. Lacking political power, Ezra failed to achieve his aims.

Some time later, Artaxerxes accepted the appeal of a court official, Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah, and appointed him governor of Jerusalem. Despite the hostility of Judah's neighbors, Nehemiah immediately undertook the rebuilding of the walls of the city. He also strengthened the town by increasing its population. He enacted new social and economic laws beneficial to the priests and the oppressed farmers, who had suffered both from the former governors and from the Jewish landlords. In this religious sphere, Nehemiah and Ezra forbade further acts of intermarriage and strengthened the observance of the Sabbath.

During this period, Nehemiah appears to have reestablished "the State of Judah" *(yehud medintha)* as an independent political unit, after a long period—since the days of Zerubbabel—during which the governors of Samaria had ruled the province.

By these actions, Ezra and Nehemiah laid the foundation for the future way of life of the Jewish people. However, they also provoked the final division between the Jews and the Samaritans. The latter abandoned the center at Jerusalem and established a separate temple on Mount Gerizim.

Thereafter, the Bible and other Jewish sources make almost no mention of the Judaean province. Only Greek sources and archaeological finds throw light on its history. The history of the Persian Empire is also known largely from the Greek writers' descriptions of the Persian-Greek wars, whereas Persian and Babylonian sources are scarce.

On the death of Artaxerxes I, a crisis arose within the empire, which ended when his son Darius II seized the throne (423–404 BCE). During his reign, new revolts erupted in Media, Anatolia, and Syria. The satrap of Egypt, Arsames, was sent to pacify these regions, but during his absence from Egypt serious disturbances broke out there as well. From this period, there are two extant letters from the year 408 BCE, which were sent by the Jewish mercenaries in the Persian-Jewish garrison at Elephantine (Yeb). They wrote to Bagohi governor of Judah and to Delaiah and Shelemiah the sons of Sanballat governor of Samaria to complain of the destruction of their Temple by the Egyptian rebels. From this time, there is also evidence of a similar military colony of Qedarite Arabs at Tell el-Maskhuta in the eastern Nile Delta. At this site, an inscription was found on a silver bowl belonging to "Qainu Bar Gashmu king of Qedar," i.e., the son of "Geshem the Arabian," one of Nehemiah's rivals.

The Persians met with success when the satraps Tissaphernes and Pharnabazus and Darius II's younger son Cyrus gave assistance to the victorious Spartans against Athens during the Peloponnesian War.

Artaxerxes II Memnon (404–358 BCE) succeeded to the throne after the death of Darius II. His rule was challenged by his younger brother Cyrus, who raised an army and marched to Babylon. There they met in battle at Cunaxa and Cyrus was killed. The war is described vividly in the *Anabasis* of the Athenian historian Xenophon.

During the reign of Artaxerxes II, the process of disintegration of the Persian Empire began. During the war between the two brothers, the Egyptians again arose in rebellion, headed by Pharaoh Amyrteus (404–399 BCE) of the 28th Dynasty from Sais. This time they succeeded in throwing off the Persian yoke for some sixty years (until 343 BCE). During their revolt, the Egyptians destroyed the Jewish-Persian military colony at Elephantine and the Arab colony at Tell el-Maskhuta.

Shortly after their successful rebellion, the Egyptians set out on an expedition against the Persians. The route of their campaign was through the Sinai desert into the coastal plain of Palestine. They appear to have occupied this territory gradually. At Gezer were found a seal impression and a broken inscribed stone bearing the name of Pharaoh Nepherites I (399–393 BCE), the last king mentioned in the Elephantine records and the first king of the 29th Dynasty from Mendes. This inscription indicates that Nepherites conquered at least the southern part of the Palestinian coastal region. His advance was apparently made possible by the war between the two brothers, which continued until 396 BCE. Nepherites successor, Achoris, formed alliances with the Cypriot king of Salamis Evagoras I and with the Athenians. They seized the northern part of the coastal plain of Palestine and for a brief period also held Tyre and Sidon. Two inscriptions of Achoris have been discovered, one at Acco and one at Sidon. The presence of the Cypriots in this region is attested by a few other contemporary inscriptions written in the Cypro-Archaic Syllabic script found at Sidon, Sarepta, Kabri, Acco, and Dor.

In 385 BCE, when Abrocamus became the satrap of Abar Nahara, peace was concluded with Athens and the Athenians withdrew their armies. Abrocamus joined forces with the satraps Pharnabazus and Tithraustes and together they expelled the Egyptians and Cypriots from Phoenicia and Palestine. By 380 BCE, they had completed the task.

One year later Pharnabazus, satrap of Cilicia, began mustering mercenaries in Acco for a fresh attack on Egypt. By 375 BCE, he had assembled three hundred ships, some twelve thousand Greek mercenaries, and a large number of native soldiers. But even before it engaged in its first battle, logistic

problems and disease had decimated the force and it was thoroughly routed by the Egyptians.

From 366 to 360 BCE, the whole of the Persian Empire was endangered by what is generally known as "the revolt of the satraps." In 360 BCE, when Pharaoh Tachos came to the throne, he assembled a large Egyptian army, as well as Greek mercenaries, and renewed the Egyptian occupation of the coastal plain of Palestine and Phoenicia. During the campaign, the Egyptians were actually assisted by the Phoenicians. As Tachos was marching to join the revolting satraps, his own nephew Nekht-har-hebi rebelled against him in the camp and Tachos was forced to surrender to the crown prince Artaxerxes III at his headquarters in Sidon. After a short time, Nekht-har-hebi himself was forced to return to Egypt because of an internal crisis and Persian rule was gradually restored to Abar Nahara as, one by one, the rebels were captured or surrendered.

In 358 BCE, Artaxerxes II died and the throne passed to Artaxerxes III Ochus (who reigned until 336). After successfully putting down the satraps' revolt, the new king set out to reconquer Egypt. After a full year of hard fighting (351–350 BCE), he abandoned the attempt. This failure was the signal for the rebellion of the towns of Phoenicia led by Tennes king of Sidon with the aid of Pharaoh Nectanebo II (359–341 BCE). The uprising encompassed a large area and caused turmoil in the empire in the west. Belysses and Mazeus, the satraps of Abar Nahara and Cilicia respectively, tried in vain to reconquer the Phoenician towns.

At the beginning of 345 BCE, Artaxerxes himself assembled a huge army in Babylon and marched against Sidon. The inhabitants of the town made preparations for a lengthy siege, but their leaders betrayed them to the enemy and the whole town was razed to the ground. The Persians then directed the satrap Bagoas to continue the pursuit into Egypt itself. In 343 BCE, Bagoas finally succeeded in restoring Egypt to the Persian yoke. Shortly after the end of the Phoenician revolt, Mazeus was appointed satrap of Abar Nahara, a post he held until the satrapy was conquered in 332 BCE by Alexander the Great.

Did Judah take part in the revolt of the Phoenician cities? According to Eusebius and Josephus Flavius (*Against Apion* 2.134), there was a rebellion in this province in the days of Artaxerxes III, and in a punitive action, many Jews were exiled to Hyrcania on the coast of the Caspian Sea. A reference to the destruction of Jericho by Diodorus Siculus should perhaps be attributed to this period, and this is perhaps supported by contemporary papyri re-

cently found in a cave east of the town (see below). Some historians believe that an extensive wave of destruction swept through the whole of Palestine. Others see a connection with the story related in the book of Judith. In the opinion of the present writer, however, recent archaeological discoveries indicate that the main Palestinian towns were only destroyed some years later by Alexander and his successors (see below).

In 338 BCE, the satrap Bagoas, the conqueror of Egypt, poisoned Artaxerxes III. The brief reign of Arses (337–336 BCE) ensued, followed by Darius III Kodomanus, the last king of the Achaemenid dynasty (336–330 BCE). Darius was defeated by Alexander at the battle of Issus and fled to the eastern part of his realm, where he was killed. The whole of the Persian Empire was annexed to Alexander's kingdom.

In Phoenicia and Palestine, Alexander met fierce resistance at Tyre and Gaza before continuing into Egypt. Later, in 332 BCE, he also had to put down a Samaritan revolt, traces of which have been found recently in the Wadi ed-Daliyeh cave, where the Samaritan rebels found refuge.

As mentioned above, there are almost no literary references to Judah and Samaria in the 4th century BCE (apart from the possible allusion to a revolt in the days of Artaxerxes III). Records found at Wadi ed-Daliyeh and Samaria indicate that all the governors of Samaria belonged to the same family. These provinces do not appear to have suffered damage in the continuous warfare that took place in the coastal plain throughout this century and possibly took no part whatsoever in such hostilities.

The Literary and Epigraphic Evidence

ALTHOUGH THE PERSIAN period is relatively late from the archaeological standpoint, it is one of the most obscure eras in Palestine and its history remains practically unknown. The Bible, the chief source for the history of the Israelite period, is almost silent concerning the Persian period. Any references it does contain are applicable only prior to the mid-5th century BCE. Among the books of the Bible ascribed to this period are Isaiah, from chapter 40 onward, Haggai, Zechariah 1–8, Malachi, Ezra, Nehemiah, several chapters of Chronicles, and the book of Esther. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah in particular present an account of the fortunes of Judah midway through the period of Persian rule. Our knowledge is supplemented by references in the Apocryphal literature: 1 Esdras, Tobit, Susanna, and Judith, works that were either composed in the Persian period or describe events

said to have occurred at that time. Brief references are also contained in the works of Josephus. Further information, mainly descriptions of the coastal area of Palestine, is derived from contemporary Greek writers such as Herodotus (mid-5th century BCE) and pseudo-Scylax (probably mid-4th century BCE). Occasional references to the history of Palestine in the 4th century BCE can also be found in the writings of Diodorus Siculus, and events from the days of Alexander the Great are mentioned by Arrian.

Throughout the years, our understanding of the period has been enriched substantially by the discovery of epigraphic documents that have either a direct or an indirect bearing on the history of Palestine. At Behistun, Persepolis, and Susa in the eastern part of the Persian Empire, inscriptions of Darius I have been discovered, which shed light on the administrative organization of the kingdom in his days. In Phoenicia, inscriptions of the Sidonian kings have been found, an outstanding example of which is the epitaph on the sarcophagus of Eshmun'ezer (end of the 6th century BCE), which speaks of this king's rule over the coast of the Sharon. Another inscription generally assigned to the Persian period is that of Yahumelekh king of Byblos.

Egyptian sources include the important archive of the Jewish military colony at Elephantine (5th century BCE), which comprises some one hundred papyri and numerous ostraca, among which are several duplicates of documents sent to the governors of Judah and Samaria. Another Egyptian archive contains papyri attributed to the satrap Arsames, who ruled Egypt at the end of the 5th century BCE. Although these make no direct reference to the history of Palestine, they furnish illuminating details on the form of organization and administration of the provinces of the empire. Similar information is also provided by the archive from Hermopolis, which contains some Aramaic documents of the 5th century BCE. Also of interest are inscriptions on silver bowls discovered at Tell el-Maskhuta east of the Nile Delta, one of which reads "Qainu son of Geshem king of Qedar," and several Aramaic inscriptions on stone stelae from Aswan and Saqqara.

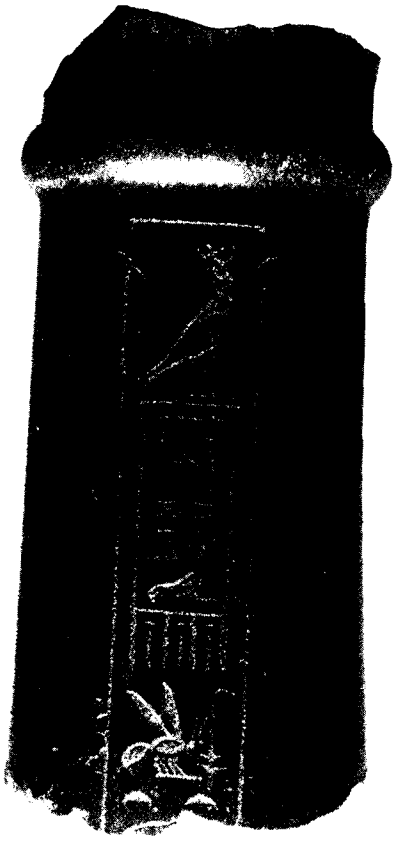
In Palestine, many written documents of a heterogeneous nature have been uncovered. It is true, however, that not even one of them is written in the Persian language and script, but two clay tablets written in the Babylonian cuneiform script have been found, both dated to the Persian period. These were inscribed in Babylon and were brought to the west by traders who traveled between the two regions.

One of the Babylonian clay tablets was found at Mikhmoret along the main coastal highway on the Sharon coast. This contains an account of the merits of a slave girl brought from Babylon. The other tablet was recovered

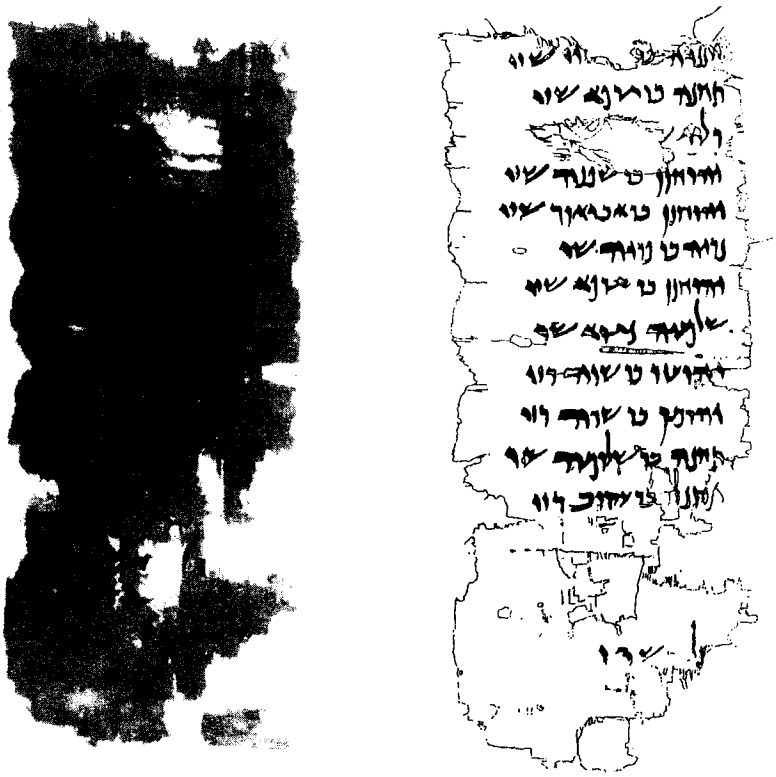
at Tawilan in Edom, i.e., along the Transjordanian trade route, and is dated to the reign of one of the three Achaemenid kings named Darius (probably the third). This is a legal document concerning a disputed sale of livestock, drawn up in Haran in upper Mesopotamia.

Two more inscriptions written in Egyptian were found. These are important documents of the Egyptian king Pharaoh Nepherites I (399–393 BCE), found at Gezer, and that of Pharaoh Achoris (393–380 BCE), found at Acco. Both belong to the period of the rule of these two kings over the Palestinian coast.

All the rest of the written material found here is written in local scripts: Phoenician, Hebrew, etc. The overwhelming majority, however, is written in Aramaic, the *lingua franca* of the age. We shall include here the Aramaic papyri found at two sites. One is the archive of papyri discovered in a cave in Wadi ed-Daliyeh, about ten miles north of Jericho. This archive belonged to refugees who fled from the city of Samaria. The documents, dating to the



III.1 Memorial stone from Acco which mentions the name of Pharaoh Achoris of the 26th Dynasty (393–380 BCE)



III.2 The inscribed papyrus from Ketef Jericho, 4th century BCE

years 375–335 BCE, shed light on the dynasty of governors of the province of Samaria. A few more papyri of the same period (late 4th century BCE) were recently found in a cave at Ketef Jericho, about one mile east of the town of Jericho. These may be connected with the same events as the Wadi ed-Daliyeh documents, but may, as their excavator believes, be somewhat earlier—dating to the time of a Jewish rebellion against the Persians centered at Jericho.

Other valuable epigraphic sources for the study of the daily life of the Persian period are the dozens of ostraca, written mainly in Aramaic but also in Phoenician and other local dialects, that have been discovered all over the country. Few of these originate at northern sites such as Dan, Mizpe Yammim, Jokneam, and Tel Qiri. More come from sites along the north coast from Achzib, Kabri, Acco, Shiqmona, Dor, Eliachin, Tel Michal, Apollonia, Tell Abu Zeitun, and Jaffa, and down to the Philistine coastal region: Tel

III.3 A Phoenician inscription on a jar from Shiqmona

Taoz, Nebi Yunis, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Tell el-Ḥesi, Tell Jemmeh, Tel Seraʿ, Tell el-Farʿah (S), Tell Abu Salima, and elsewhere. Others have been recovered in Samaria and Judah: in the city of Samaria, at Gezer, Kirbet el-Qom, Yatir, En-Gedi, Lachish, and Maresha, among other sites.

Even more important are the large Persian-period ostraca assemblages found in west Idumaea at Tel Sheva and Arad, and also at Tell el-Kheleifeh on the Red Sea coast. But the largest group of all, which contains more than four hundred ostraca purchased from a Jerusalemite antiquity dealer, was recently published by I. Ephʿal, J. Naveh, and A. Lemaire. The exact site in Idumaea from which these originate is not yet known. Nearly all the texts in this collection deal with the cultivation of fields and orchards. They consist of dockets that provide the names of the parties and commodities involved in the transactions. One of them, however, was a legal document, apparently reporting a court decision concerning a loan. The texts are dated according to the regnal years of Persian and Greek kings, and range from 363 to 311 BCE.

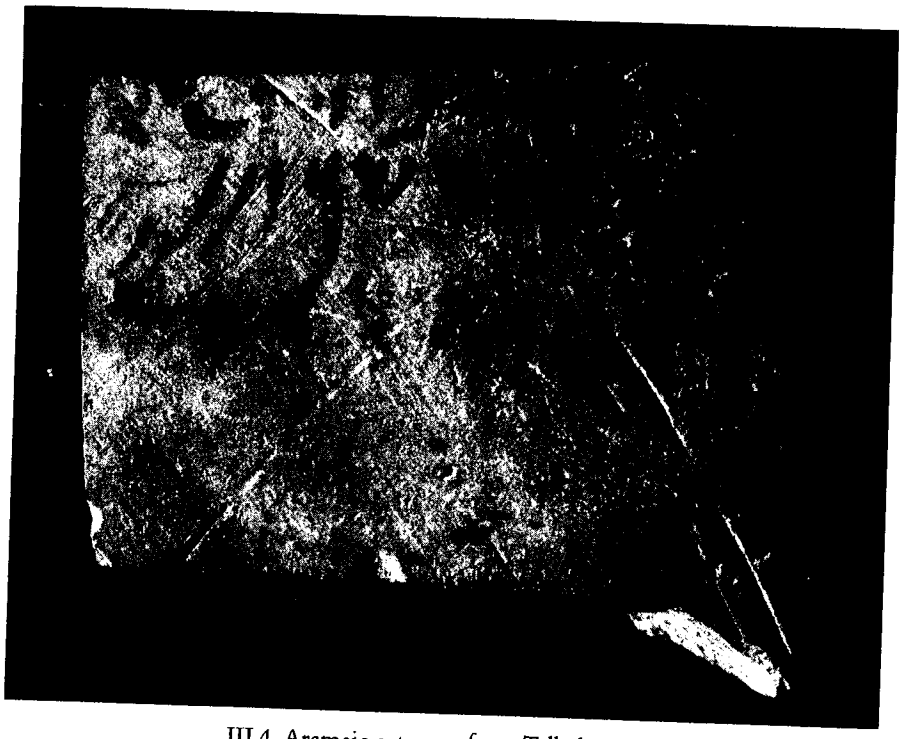
From Transjordan, we now have some Aramaic ostraca, mainly from Heshbon and Tell el-ʿUmeiri in Ammon and from Tell es-Saʿidyieh in the Jordan Valley.

Even more important are the inscribed seal impressions belonging to the

officials of the local Persian provincial administration. These have been found on jar handles as well as on bullae. A few bullae assemblages have been found; the most important of these, the hoard of bullae from a post-exilic Judaean archive near Jerusalem, was published by N. Avigad.

More bullae were found during the excavations of the City of David in Jerusalem. The largest bullae group originated in the city of Samaria and was discovered at the cave in Wadi ed-Daliyeh. Most of these were not epigraphic, but some carried the names of provincial officials and governors such as Sanballat and Delaiah.

Both inscribed seals and seal impressions mention the names of two of the provinces: Judah and Ammon. On the Judaean seals, the names of some of the rulers of the province appear, sometimes with their title, such as "governor" *(peḥa)*: Yehoʿezer, Ahzai, and Elnathan, in addition to Bagohi, who is mentioned in the Elephantine papyri. Some seal impressions provide important information on the administrative organization of the provinces and the names of their officials, such as the Judaean seal bearing the inscription "Shelomith maidservant of Elnathan the *peḥa*" or a Phoenician seal from Tell Qasile belonging to a certain "servant of the king."



III.4 Aramaic ostracon from Tell el-Farʿah

Finally, let us mention the hundreds of numismatic finds, coins struck by the governments of different Palestinian provinces. Thus far, coins of the Persian period have been found with the names of Judah, Samaria and Ashdod, Ashkelon and Gaza. Other coins bear the names of governors, such as "Yehezqiah the *peḥa*" among the Judaean coins and Sanballat among the Samaritan ones. Others carry the titles of priests, such as "Yohanan the *kohen*" ("priest"). But most bear names without titles and appear to have been the property of lower-level officials.

All these rich new finds contribute much to our understanding of the period's history, providing information about political organization, names of the previously unknown governors and officials, the composition of the population in different regions, cult, daily life, and diverse cultural influences.

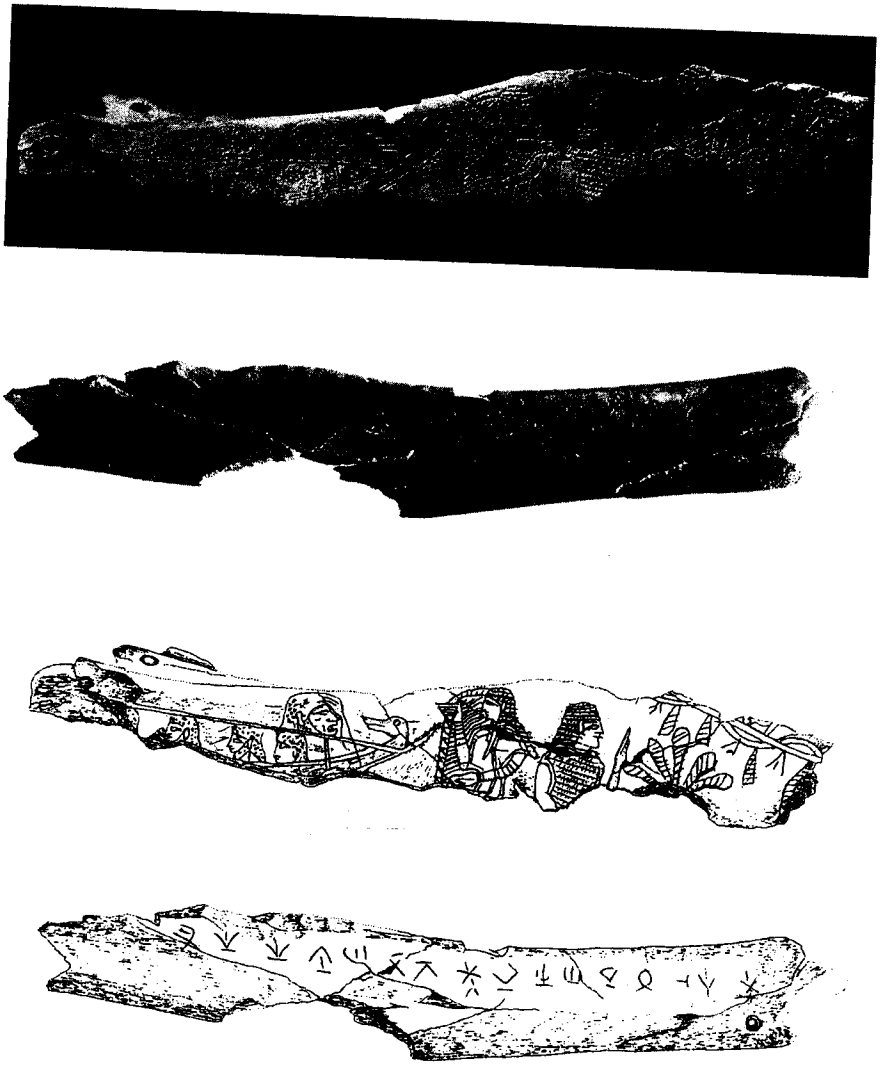
It is interesting to note that among all the assemblages of Persian-period inscriptions from Palestine, almost none are written in Greek. One inscription from Tell el-Ḥesi is in Greek characters but contains a Phoenician personal name. Another, from Dor, consists of only a few letters. Individual Greek letters are sometimes found incised on pottery vessels.

The only archaeological evidence thus far for the use of the Greek language here during the Persian period is from sites along the north coast: Sidon, Sarepta, Kabri, Acco, and Dor, where Greek-language inscriptions written in the Cypro-Archaic script were found. Most are dedications to various local deities. The first traders and soldiers who reached Palestine in the Persian period may have utilized this script.

Another script rarely encountered in this country from Persian-period contexts is Arabic. On the southern coast, near el-ʿArish, a cultic vessel bearing a Thamudic-Arabic dedicatory inscription was found.

The Geographical-Historical Background

PALESTINE IN THE Persian period formed part of the satrapy called "Beyond the River"—Hebrew: *eber hanahar* (Ezra 8:36; Nehemiah 2:7, 9; Aramaic: *abar nahara* (Ezra 4:10–11, 16, 20; 4:3, 6)—a term derived from Assyrian administration usage *(ebir-nari),* known from the time of Esarhaddon and perhaps even much earlier (1 Kings 5:4). In the list of towns in the *Periplus* of pseudo-Scylax, the region was still known as Coele-Syria, which is a translation of the name and sound of the Aramaic *kol-syria* ("all of Syria"), an ancient term that also apparently designates the Syrian hinterland.



III.5 A Cypro-Archaic inscription and a Phoenician maritime scene carved on a cow scapula from Dor

Although the boundaries of the satrapy correspond with those delimited in the Assyrian period (see above), they passed through a number of transformations before becoming fixed. During the reign of Cyrus, all of the conquered Babylonian territories (including Babylon itself) and the Babylonian Abar Nahara region were apparently absorbed into one satrapy that was placed under the rule of the satrap Gabaru. At the beginning of the reign of

Darius I (522–486 BCE), a far-reaching reorganization of the Persian imperial administration was carried out. According to Herodotus (3.88–95), the empire was subdivided during the reign of Darius into twenty satrapies. Babylon was severed from Abar Nahara and annexed to Assyria to form a single satrapy (no. 9 in the list), while Abar Nahara, which was the fifth satrapy, included Syria, Phoenicia, Palestine, and Cyprus (3.91). This division is not, however, confirmed by the epigraphic sources from the time of Darius I. Three inscriptions of Darius I, which contain the names of the satrapies he established, omit the satrapy of Abar Nahara. Thus, it seems that during his reign, the satrapy of Abar Nahara was still included within the larger unit of Babylon and it is clear that the list of satrapies appearing in Herodotus—despite its attribution to Darius—is later and dates to the reign of Xerxes I (486–465 BCE). Babylon was surely detached from the satrapy of Abar Nahara only after its rebellion against the Persians and its destruction in 482 BCE. Its mention in the Bible in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah does not date prior to this time. At any rate, its boundaries remained more or less as Herodotus described them until the end of the Persian period. In almost all the contemporary sources in which the boundaries of the satrapy are mentioned, only the sites along the coast appear, and we lack a description of the eastern boundary. According to Herodotus (3.91), the northern frontier extended from Poseidium on the border between Cilicia and Syria (probably the modern site of Ras el-Basit) and in the south as far as Egypt. The southernmost border site is also given by Herodotus in two additional passages, and in both cases it is situated at Lake Sirbonis (Sabhat Bardawil): "near which stretches Mt. Casius" (3.5; 2.6).

In the *Periplus* of Scylax (pseudo-Scylax), which dates about a century later, the boundaries of the satrapy are recorded at distances of stadia from Thapsacus in the north "to the city of Ashkelon" in the south. Though K. Galling maintained that Thapsacus was located in the area of the Orontes (since he was of the opinion that Scylax included only coastal cities), it has a close resemblance to 1 Kings 5:4. In both cases, it seems that the reference is apparently to a city on the banks of the Euphrates. It is strange that the southernmost border point terminates at Ashkelon, and not, as in the time of Herodotus, at Lake Sirbonis. Scylax seems to have omitted the entire area under Arabian rule. On the coins of his reign, the satrap Mazdi, one of the last rulers of this satrapy, is given the title "ruler of Abar Nahara and Cilicia." The Cilician coastal plain may also have been annexed to this satrapy at the end of the Persian period.

The internal administrative division of the satrapy is not described in the

Greek sources, though Herodotus mentions four regions on the coast, which were occupied by three different nations. In the north (apparently extending from Poseidium) was Phoenicia, whose southern boundary is not mentioned. From Phoenicia "to the boundaries of the city of Cadytis [Gaza], the country belonged to the Syrians, who are known as Palestinians. From Cadytis to Ienysus [el-'Arish?], the seaports on the coast belong to the king of Arabia and the land from Ienysus to the Sirbonis Lake is Syrian territory" (3.5 and cf. on the Syrians and the Phoenicians: 2.104, 116; and on the Arabs: 3.88, 91, 97). The subdivision of the area between Syria and Phoenicia is also recorded, as was noted, in the *Periplus* of Scylax. He omits all mention of the Arabs, perhaps because he located the satrapy's southern border at Ashkelon. In contrast, he mentions in detail the specific Phoenician ownership (Tyrian and Sidonian; see below) of the various coastal cities of Palestine. He apparently employed the term Syrian to designate the inland population.

The picture presented by the Greek sources is not an accurate representation (except for the coastal area) of the administrative division of Palestine in the Persian period, which must be learned from the contemporary biblical sources and from what is known of the Assyrian administrative system. It is the consensus that the Persians did not alter the internal administrative division of Palestine, which was established under Assyrian and Babylonian rule. From the time of Sargon II (715 BCE) on, the Assyrian administration system in the north of the country consisted of the provinces of Megiddo, Samaria, and Dor and another province in the Gilead. In the Babylonian period, when the southern part of Palestine was also subjugated and the remnants of formerly independent states were eradicated, new provinces were, perhaps, annexed: Judah, Ashdod, and Idumaea (the southern Judaean Hills) in the west and Ammon and Moab in Transjordan (see above). Farther south, the Qedarite Arabs ruled Gaza, the Negev, and apparently also Edom. Since conclusive contemporary evidence is lacking, the organization of these provinces by the Babylonians is a matter of conjecture, though the existence of the northern provinces in Transjordan during the Babylonian period may perhaps also be indicated by the reference to Hauran and Gilead in Ezekiel 47:8. Some of the above-mentioned provinces may have been created only at the beginning of the Persian period. In the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, mention is made of the provinces of Samaria in the north, Ashdod in the west, and Ammon in the east. The southern region was occupied by Geshem the Arabian. The existence of a province in Moab may be indicated by the biblical reference to "the children of the Pahath-Moab" (Ezra 2:6; 8:4; 10:30; Ne-

hemiah 7:1). No reference to Edom is found and it is possible that during this period it was annexed to the Arabian territory. Further contemporary evidence for the existence of the provinces of Samaria and Judah can be found in the Elephantine papyri and in the documents from Wadi ed-Daliyeh. The names of the provinces of Samaria, Judah, and Ammon also appear on coins, seals, and seal impressions that have been uncovered in several excavations, sometimes in addition to the term *pḥwh* ("province"), meaning an area under the rule of a *pḥh* (no distinction is made between the larger unit, the satrapy, and the secondary division, the province, just as the titles of the governor and satrap are interchangeable). The smaller unit of the satrapy of Abar Nahara is also called *medintha* ("state"). Proof that these terms are identical is provided by the name of the province of Judah, which also appears in the form *yehud medintha* (Ezra 5:8). This name is also taken from Persian administrative usage and it is merely the Aramaic equivalent of the Persian-Assyrian name (cf. also Esther 1:1, where the whole territory of the Persian Empire is divided into 127 *medinoth* and not, as was customary, into satrapies; and cf. also 3 Esdras 3:2).

The subdivision of a *medinah* ("province") is described in chapter 3 of Nehemiah, which mentions the rulers of the *pelekh* ("district" or "part" [Nehemiah 3:14–15]). The *pelekh* is further divided into a half-district (Nehemiah 3:9, 12, 16–18). According to the roster, Judah was organized into at least five districts (see below for details).

Whereas the administrative division into provinces *(medinoth)* apparently existed in Transjordan and was also employed as the political framework in Samaria, Judah, and Ammon, i.e., in each area occupied by distinct national groups, some scholars have expressed doubts that this framework also applied to the other parts of Palestine. Phoenician organization, for example, was essentially urban, while the Arabs dwelled in a tribal framework. Thus, in the view of M. Avi-Yonah, the Persian administrative structure west of the Jordan was adapted wholly to the heterogeneous nature of the population, and in fact included three types of political units: province *(pḥwh* or *medinah),* autonomous cities, and tribal areas. In the first category, he included the Galilee (the province of Megiddo), Samaria, Idumaea, and Ashdod. The second category is represented by the coastal cities that the Persians granted to the jurisdiction of Tyre and Sidon (see below, with the exception of Acco and Gaza, which, in Avi-Yonah's opinion, were under direct Persian rule). The Negev and southern Transjordan belonged to the Arab tribes.

Avi-Yonah's theory is impossible to prove on the basis of known sources, and in our view it is doubtful. Though according to pseudo-Scylax' list of

cities it can be assumed that all the coastal cities were in the possession of one or another of the Phoenician kings, this document, by its very nature, does not mention any of the larger units, the provinces. We have already seen in the previous chapters that it was very likely, according to the results of recent excavations at Dor, as well as new Assyrian documents, that already in the Assyrian period Dor became a separate province. This province should have continued in existence, like all the others, into the Persian period. In any case, in another contemporary Persian-period source, the Eshmun'ezer Inscription, the area described also bears an amazing resemblance to the territory of the province of Dor. Another possible hint of the existence of a provincial framework in the northern coastal plain as well may be found in Herodotus' account, which, as was noted, distinguishes between the areas held by Phoenicians, Syria-Palestinians, Arabians, and, again, Syrians. This can be translated in accordance with the provinces known to us as Dor (Phoenician), Ashdod (Syro-Palestinian), the Gaza region (Arabian territory), and another unknown province also belonging to the Syro-Palestinians, which was situated in this period to the south of modern el-'Arish.

The existence of large administrative units in the coastal plain is also attested by the numerous remnants of forts, royal granaries, etc., along the entire coastal Via Maris (Way of the Sea). Many of these were initially erected in the Assyrian age, destroyed by the Babylonians, and then rebuilt by the Persians. We shall mention here the Persian-period forts at Shiqmona, Tell Kudadi, Tell Qasile, Rishon le-Zion, Ashdod, Tell Jemmeh, Tell el-Far'ah (S), Tel Sera', Tel Haror, Ruqeish, Sheikh Zuweid, etc. Pseudo-Scylax also mentions a "king's palace" at Ashkelon, and since in Avi-Yonah's view as well, Ashkelon belonged to the province of Ashdod, this palace may well have been the seat of a governor. It is possible that this line of forts along the coastal plain formed a part of the excellent network of roads and communication constructed by the Persians in all the lands under their rule. Such large-scale projects entailed employment of royal officials who could deal with large areas and not merely with isolated cities. It therefore seems that the "ownership" and rights granted to the various Phoenician kings in the coastal cities by the Persians involved such matters as tax concessions and other economic advantages, though not necessarily political rights. It thus seems more probable that the southern coastal plain was organized only in a network of "autonomous" cities. On the other hand, in the Negev and Sinai, i.e., in sparsely populated areas that were not occupied by sedentary peoples, Persian rule aimed at preserving the goodwill of the Arab tribes who received payments for protecting the remote areas inaccessible to the Persian

army. This area, however, by its very nature, was never organized into clear administrative units. Nevertheless, excavations here, too, have uncovered evidence of a network of permanent fortresses that contained Persian garrison troops, as, for example, at Tel Sheva, Arad, Ḥorvat Ritma, Tell el-Kheleifeh, and Kadesh-Barnea. According to an ostracon of the Persian period found at Arad, the fortress at this site was manned by a military unit that was designated as a *degel* ("standard"), a large Persian unit also known from the Elephantine documents.

In summing up, it appears that in Persian-period Palestine the administrative structure retained the basic divisions established during the Assyrian age, but in a more developed form. This period also witnessed the loss of a modicum of autonomy enjoyed by the inhabitants of the south, both east and west of the Jordan, at the end of the Assyrian period. This process may have already begun in the Babylonian age.

Below we shall present a detailed description of the settlements of Palestine in the Persian period based on a summary of the evidence from excavations and surveys as well as epigraphic finds and historical sources.