Was the Book of Ezekiel Written in a Refugee Camp? An Investigation
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Introduction: What Is the Book of Ezekiel

The book called Ezekiel is strange. Consistently so. Paul Joyce speaks of a 'family resemblance' among the material in the book that creates a homogeneity that contrasts with other prophetic texts.

Prominent among its consistently enigmatic tenor is hostility towards outgroups. Scholars have noted this feature in many ways—with Dalit Rom-Shiloni recently categorizing Ezekiel's dominant message as extreme exclusivity. Crucially, Rom-Shiloni notes that this viewpoint plays an immense role in shaping the enduring ideas about and responses to the forced displacement of Judahites to Babylonia. Any insight, therefore, into what produced it, why it endured the time of Judahite residence in Babylonia, and held so much influence over those returning to Judah is particularly desirable.

Commentators have explored how the trauma of forced displacement to Babylonia may have produced this response. It is not hard to imagine that one would develop a strong distaste for the the imperial society that destroyed your city, captured you, and took you to a foreign land. It is even possible to work out why one would express resentment against those from your own community who were not forcibly displaced and continued to live in Judah, as Ezekiel does. And yet, that is not how one has to respond. Evidence of that comes from various fronts. Jeremiah 29, the so-called letter to the exiles, advocates for the Judahites taken to the city of Babylon to seek the welfare of its inhabitants—hardly a view reconcilable with extreme exclusivity. What, moreover, of the later evidence for those Judahites who choose to remain in Babylonia and to integrate with its culture? Why does Ezekiel respond so differently from Jeremiah—a text many scholars have noted that it otherwise shares many similarities with—and how does its view persist in a fashion that makes it a prominent feature in the ideology of those who do return to Judah?

This essay investigates a fresh hypothesis that may explain these features as the resulting from an aspect of the social setting of the Judahite involuntary migrants in Babylonia: forced displacement to a rural, isolated, mono-ethnic settlement that resembles what would now be called a refugee camp. Is it possible that Ezekiel's animosity to out groups and the persistence of these views results from the social context out of which the text emerges? Or, as the intentionally provocative title of this essay suggests, 'Was the book of Ezekiel written in a refugee camp?'

What Is A Refugee Camp?

Refugee camps feature regularly in the news nowadays. Most people are familiar with their role in managing the challenges of large-scale involuntary migrations and some of their common trappings: expansive grids of tents, improvised marketplaces and communal areas, all within a boundary fence. This depiction of the Zaatari camp in Jordan illustrates the point:

> Looming out of the surrounding desert and surrounded by a perimeter fence, the camp is visually very striking… In a very short time, Zaatari has become the fourth largest concentration of people in Jordan. Its infrastructure and amenities have steadily improved. And with the support of the Jordanian authorities and international community, the refugees have succeeded in making the camp a somewhat more comfortable place to live than when it was hurriedly established…[1]

Scholars of migration emphasize that one must disarticulate this description into features that define a particular experience of involuntary migration. One should note at least the following identifiable aspects. One, the camp is in a rural location. Two, its location is not chosen by its residents. Three, its boundaries are clearly demarcated, and they separate the involuntary migrant community from the host population. The impact of this design is to deny almost any possibility of interaction between the involuntary migrants and the host population among whom they

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[1] Jeff Crisp, 'Zaatari: A Camp and Not a City', 9 Oct 2015 (https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/zaatari-camp-and-not-city, accessed on 29 Jan 2021).

purportedly live. Four, there is an important exception to this isolation: aid officials or state affiliates, charged with the administrative tasks that document the involuntary migrants' presence and facilitate the clinical task of distributing material aid often engage with the residents of the camp. Recognize too, that such aid or state workers do not relate to the camp residents as equals, but in view of their role are the more powerful party in an asymmetric power relationship.

Approached thus, one sees that the modern term 'refugee camp' connotes a social setting that might occur in any time and place: the concept is of a settlement of involuntary migrants living in a rural, isolated context with little to no contact with those outside this migrant community, except perhaps for institutional representatives primarily interested in its smooth running. This definition enables a more nuanced version of the question that shapes this essay. Did the book called Ezekiel emerge from a community of forcibly displaced, contingently settled, involuntary migrants living in an isolated, rural setting in which they dealt regularly with institutional overseers and essentially no one else?[2]

Ezekiel's Implied Setting: "Camp" Chebar

To begin answering this question, it is necessary to review what one can reconstruct of the social setting from which the book called Ezekiel emerges. The book itself contributes some information, but equally important is what can be deduced from external sources.

The superscription to Ezekiel specifies a community of involuntary migrants by the Chebar canal (Ezek 1:3). This "obscure body of water" is "near" Nippur, though M. Greenberg explains that one must distinguish it from the Euphrates, which ran through the city of Nippur.[3] Cornelia Wunsch contends that Ezekiel describes an

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[2] This question could be asked readily of other groups too. For instance, Johannes Hackl and Michael Jursa contend a similar phenomenon prevails among Egyptians in Babylonia ("Egyptians in Babylonia in the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid Periods" in J. Stökl and C. Waerzeggers [eds.] *Exile and Return: The Babylonian Context* (BZAW 478; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015], 160).

[3] M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 40; cf. D. I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), 84.

area roughly bounded by Nippur, Karkara, and Keš, in a rural region. Wunsch and Laurie Pearce argue that the involuntary migrants living in this area worked on large irrigation projects, directed by the imperial Babylonian apparatus, probably as a prelude to them being organized to farm this previously unused land.[4] Karen Radner's recent study of the Assyrian circular interchange approach to forced displacement indicates the importance of the labour these involuntary migrants provided to the imperial state—whether it was as skilled artisans (e.g., in Dur-Šarruken) or as unskilled laborers (e.g., in Hamath).[5]

The call narrative in Ezek 1–3 gives further indications about the setting. Chapter 3 locates the community of Judahite "exiles" in Tel Abib. Though the name is familiar, its meaning remains uncertain. There is good evidence on which to work from the literal meaning of Tel Abib—"mound of spring produce"—and to see it as a reference to a remote, rural site also used in the Mesopotamian *mīs pî* ritual to induct cult statues.[6] Ezekiel 3:22 reinforces this impression, describing the prophet going out אל הבקעה. This valley or plain is probably not a specific location, but a symbolic space, "an appropriate place for a private meeting with God."[7] All this suggests that Ezekiel envisions a rural, perhaps desolate place, some substantial distance from a large population, wherein the Judahite community would have lived in isolation from other groups.[8]

To these internal features one should add evidence from āl-Yāhūdu, ālu šam Našar, and the archive of Zababa-šar-uṣur, known together as the *āl-Yāhūdu* corpus.[9]

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[4] Wunsch, "Glimpses on the Lives of Deportees in Rural Babylonia," 252–253; cf. Pearce, "Continuity and Normality," 170–171.

[5] Karen Radner, "The 'Lost Tribes of Israel' in the Context of the Resettlement Programme of the Assyrian Empire" 101-23 in S. Hasegawa, C. Levin, and K. Radner (eds.) *The Last Days of the Kingdom of Israel* (BZAW 511; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018), 109-22.

[6] C. A. Strine, "Ezekiel's Image Problem: The Mesopotamian Cult Statue Induction Ritual and the *Imago Dei* Anthropology in the Book of Ezekiel," *CBQ* 76 (2014): 252–272.

[7] Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 153; cf. Strine, "Ezekiel's Image Problem," 258–260.

[8] Cf. I. Eph'al, "On the Political and Social Organization of the Jews in Babylonian Exile," in *Deutscher Orientalistentag Vorträge* (ed. F. Steppat; Weisbaden: Franz Steiner, 1981), 106–112 and L. E. Pearce, "New Evidence for Judeans in Babylonia," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (ed. O. Lipschits and M. Oeming; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 407–408.

[9] On the provenance and features of the corpus, see Tero Alstola, *Judeans in Babylonia: A Study of*

Pearce explains these texts "establish an urban-rural divide… among the Judeans from the inception of the exile"[10] in which a "physical distance separated the urban Judean elite situated in Babylon from a segment of the population relocated in the countryside."[11] Communities in these rural locations lived as "groups of 'ethnically' homogenous state dependents, concentrated in a town named for their place of origin"[12]—the "town of the Judeans" and shortly thereafter "Judahtown." Here, they were either indentured to work on state-organized building projects[13] or compelled to farm state-provided bow-fiefs, which they maintained in order to pay a substantial amount of rent and tax, thereby enriching the imperial apparatus of Babylonia.[14]

Pearce's urban-rural divide recalls an important feature of the "refugee camp" setting discussed above that makes residence in the camp a distinct form of involuntary migration. Equally important, it is crucial to remember that "the intense focus on Zaatari… has deflected attention from the fact that the vast majority of Syrian refugees in Jordan are not living in camps, but in urban, suburban, and rural areas scattered across the country."[15] In short, just as contemporary Syrian refugees have distinctly different experiences of involuntary migration depending on whether they end up in an urban integrated context or contingently settled in an isolated, rural

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Deportees in the Sixth and Fifth Centuries BCE (CHANE 109; Leiden: Brill, 2020), 37-46.

[10] Pearce, "Continuity and Normality," 179.

[11] Pearce, "Continuity and Normality," 180.

[12] L. E. Pearce, "'Judean': A Special Status in Neo-Babylonian and Achemenid Babylonia?," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Achaemenid Period: Negotiating Identity in an International Context* (ed. O. Lipschits, G. N. Knoppers, and M. Oeming (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 271; cf. C. Wunsch, "Glimpses on the Lives of Deportees in Rural Babylonia," in *Arameans, Chaldeans, and Arabs in Babylonia and Palestine in the First Millennium B.C.* (ed. A. Berlejung and M. P. Streck (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013), 248–249; F. R. Magdalene and C. Wunsch, "Slavery Between Judah and Babylon: The Exilic Experience," in *Slaves and Households in the Near East* (ed. L. Culbertson; Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2011), 127.

[13] B. Oded, *Mass Deportations and Deportees in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1979), 98-99; cf. M. Jursa, "On Aspects of Taxation in Achaemenid Babylon: New Evidence from Borsippa," in *Organisation des Pouvoirs et Contacts Culturels dans les Pays de l'Empire Achéménide* (ed. P. Briant and M. Chauveau; Paris: de Boccard, 2009), 239 and Magdalene and Wunsch, "Slavery," 126-28.

[14] Wunsch, "Glimpses on the Lives of Deportees in Rural Babylonia," 25–27.

[15] Jeff Crisp, 'Zaatari: A Camp and Not a City', 9 Oct 2015 (https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/zaatari-camp-and-not-city, accessed on 13 Dec 2019).

context, so also did the Babylonian program of forced displacement enforce a similar divergence in experience for the Judahites brought to Mesopotamia in the sixth century B.C.E.

L. Malkki's work among the Hutu displaced from Burundi during the 1990s illustrates how this dynamic drives human responses to involuntary migration. In the 1990s two distinct groups of Hutu settled in Tanzania as involuntary migrants: one community in the urban center called Kigoma, inherently mixing with other groups, the other in a government-run camp in the remote area of Mishamo, cordoned off from outsiders. Malkki's research demonstrates that "[i]t is the Hutu 'spatially isolated and insulated' in Tanzanian camps…who have constructed a new nationalism complete with a mythical past that demonizes the Tutsi [who persecuted them] and looks forward to a future in a Burundi cleansed of Tutsi."[16] Their response to involuntary migration, in other words, is characterized by ethnocentrism and a deep desire to return to their former home. By contrast, the Hutu living in urban, integrated Kigoma develop "rival constructions of order and morality" that tend towards the pragmatic management of their identity. Instead of identifying as refugees, they shape their identity in such a way as to support "key axes of assimilation" with the wider population.[17] These Hutu, in contrast to those in the camp, exhibit an openness to positive engagement with outside groups.

The disparity between the responses of integrated-urban and isolated-rural groups furnishes the following interpretive heuristic: whereas involuntary migrants in integrated living environments respond with a pragmatic approach to identity, a willingness to see ethnic boundaries as movable or porous, and an openness to engaging with other groups in order to succeed socially and economically in their new context, involuntary migrants in isolated living environments display a propensity for

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[16] Colson's summary of Malkki's work appears here because it succinctly communicates the importance of her research (Colson, "Anthropological Response," 10). See also J. M. Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair: Palestinian Refugee Camps* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), especially her concluding remarks on p. 220.

[17] L. H. Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 153–154. The three key axes are intermarriage, pursuing legal naturalization, and personal socioeconomic opportunities.

rehearsing histories of communal origin in order to establish and reinforce a strong communal sensibility and ethnic consciousness that generates decisive diacritics for in-group/out-group identification, and an almost-millenarian outlook on the necessity to return "home."[18] Despite their shared background and common ethnic identity, the radically different social settings inhabited by these groups prompt them to employ shared ideas in profoundly different responses to their experience of migration.

Further exploration shows that Ezekiel exhibits many of the features Malkki recognizes among the Hutu in the Mishamo camp.

Embracing Guilt: Retaining Agency in the Camp

Crisp observes about the Syrians in Zaatari that:

> 'it is not normal to be accommodated behind a barbed wire fence and to be deprived of freedom of movement. It is not normal to live in a situation where the entire population lacks the rights and entitlements of citizens. And it is certainly not normal to wake up each day without knowing when or even if you will ever be able to return to the place that you consider to be your home.[19]

One way communities respond to this abnormal environment is to re-narrate their past and present in order to express guilt for having become forcibly displaced. Often, such groups imagine the present as a purifying experience that prepares them for a better future. Adopting this perspective retains their agency in the situation.

Ezekiel re-narrates history just this way. Ezekiel 16, 20, and 23 ascribe responsibility for the forced displacement on the Judahites themselves. Chapter 20 reflects the didactic use of history Malkki identifies in the closed camp of Mishamo perhaps better than any other passage in the book. Malkki says of the Hutu in Mishamo that:

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[18] Cf. Colson, "Anthropological Response," 9, who summarizes the issue thus: "The ethnographic record points to camps and resettlement communities as seed beds most conducive to the growth of memory and the pursuit of the myth of return."

[19] Jeff Crisp, 'Zaatari: A Camp and Not a City', 9 Oct 2015 (https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/zaatari-camp-and-not-city, accessed on 13 Dec 2019).

One of the most immediately obvious characteristics of the refugees' telling of their history was its didacticism…There were lists of traits, lists of "symptoms", lists of faults…The didacticism was in itself a central performative device, but it also reflected the refugees' urgent preoccupation with … rendering credible to outsiders the history that had brought them to Mishamo'.[20]

The *Unheilsgeschichte* of Ezek 20 gives a scathing account of Israel's behavior stretching back to the time in Egypt before the exodus. All this warrants Jerusalem's defeat and the involuntary migration of Ezekiel and his compatriots (vv. 3-31) as necessary to keep YHWH's name from being profaned among the onlooking nations (20:9, 14, 22). Whatever one concludes about the historical reality of the material, the obvious aim of the passage is to explain that Judah's own actions across history prompted the forced displaced of this community to Babylonia. Far from self-flagellation, explaining Judah's fate this way takes agency from the imperial Babylonian juggernaut and retains it for the Judahites.

Addressing the present circumstances in 'Camp' Chebar, Ezekiel diminishes the realm of ethical responsibility to preserve agency too. Andrew Mein demonstrates that Ezekiel 14 and 18 reflect a "domestication of ethics." When reviewing the past, Ezekiel addresses the "national and communal sphere," targets the monarchy and the political class, and criticizes decisions affecting the whole community.[21] Addressing those in Babylonia, however, Ezekiel attends to issues regarding how to organize life within a small community isolated from outsiders.[22] Mein's domestication reflects the reduced scope of life in the rural, isolated, mono-cultural setting on the Chebar canal that frames the book called Ezekiel.

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20 Malkki, *Purity and Exile*, 53.
21 Andrew Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 214.
22 Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile*, 137–215, especially 175–176 and 214–215.

Millenarianism: The Hope of Return

The present challenges of the camp do not overshadow the future. Instead, deep dissatisfaction with the camp only catalyzes impassioned talk of the future. Recall how critical a vision of the future is to those Hutu Malkki interviews in Camp Mishamo. It is the Hutu "spatially isolated and insulated" in Tanzanian camps "who have constructed a new nationalism complete with a mythical past that demonizes the Tutsi [who persecuted them] and looks forward to a future in a Burundi cleansed of Tutsi."[23]

Likewise, Ezekiel articulates impassioned hopes for the future. For instance, the need for a communal return to Judah and the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple in Ezekiel 37–48 parallels the rhetoric of radical commitment to return among the Hutu. This section also envisions a cleansing of the land: first, the cosmic battle in chs. 37–39 eliminates potential outside enemies, then 44:4-16 cleanses the temple of internal impurities like non-Zadokite priests; all this is prelude to the reorganization of Judahite space into a utopian landscape where the unmediated presence of YHWH can dwell. Ezekiel is a paradigmatic example of the millenarian hopes Malkki identifies among the Hutu.[24]

Ethnocentrism: Camp v. Town Responses

The intensely pro-insider rhetoric of 44:4-16 appears is far from isolated in Ezekiel. One finds it in the denouement of the *Unheilsgeschichte.* While the first half of ch. 20 re-narrates the community's history in a way that makes them responsible for their current predicament, the second half explains the way forward requires militant ethnocentrism. Implicit in-group preferences expressed in vv. 3-31 puncture the façade in v. 32: the text castigates Judahite involuntary migrants that want "to be like the nations, like the families of the lands" by worshipping "wood and stone." This

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[23] See above, note 16.

[24] For further discussion of how Ezekiel 37–48 expresses this desire in a polemical way, see C. A. Strine, "*Chaoskampf* against Empire: YHWH's Battle against Gog (Ezekiel 38–39) as Resistance Literature", 87-108 in A. Lenzi and J. Stökl (eds), *Divination, Politics, and Ancient Near Eastern Empires* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014).

suggestion elicits aggrieved promises of judgment from YHWH, who will be like a shepherd sorting such transgressors out of the flock. Indeed, Ezek 20:39 indicates those who choose religious assimilation should stop worshipping YHWH because they profane YHWH's holy name.[25]

Note how fundamentally divergent this advice is from that given to the Judahites in the city of Babylon addressed by Jer 29. The well-known guidance to "seek the welfare of the city to which I have displaced you and pray to YHWH on its behalf; for in its prosperity you shall prosper" (29:7) resembles Malkki's Hutu sources in the town of Kigamo who demonstrate a pragmatic openness to axes of assimilation with their hosts. Due to the noted the similarities between Jeremiah and Ezekiel on so many other points, this divergence is all the more striking. It is precisely this combination of shared ideas applied in contrasting manners that underscores the similarity to the behavior Malkki maps among the two groups of Hutu involuntary migrants. The dissimilarity in rhetoric reflects two communities with shared pre-existing ideological frameworks arriving at incompatible responses because of markedly different experiences of involuntary migration.

Interface with the Host: Ezekiel as Translator
Even the two main figures in the book—Ezekiel and YHWH—reflect the influences of the refugee camp experience.

Ezekiel, the Zadokite priest and polymath apparently knowledgeable of Babylonian language and culture, is rejected by his fellow Judahites settled along the Chebar Canal (cf. Ezek 33:30-33). Again, approaching this evidence with the refugee camp in mind can explain an otherwise puzzling set of characteristics.

As a priest, Ezekiel comes from an elite, learned background. He is literate, he is familiar with ritual texts and practice, and he knows mythical tropes and their constellation of ideas. The superscription to the book suggests he is a priest primed to begin service in the Jerusalem temple (Ezek 1:3). He appears as a man at the peak of

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[25] Cf. C. A. Strine, "The Role of Repentance in the Book of Ezekiel: A Second Chance for the Second Generation," *JTS* 63 (2012): 467-91.

his intellectual development. He makes an excellent candidate to be retrained for an interface role that would create a working connection between the Babylonian state apparatus and the forcibly displaced community in Chebar,[26] who were relocated there specifically to enrich the Babylonians through their work in agriculture.

Recall that the camp setting involves isolation from other communities, but regular engagement with officials there to ensure the smooth, efficient running of the settlement.[27] It is notable, then, to revisit what Pearce and Wunsch say about this matter from the *āl-Yāhūdu* corpus. Reflecting on the evidence of tablet No. 1 (572 BCE) from the Sofer collection, they remark that "the settlement of the Judeans—in spite of being predominantly inhabited by Judean deportees—was by no means culturally insular," but reflects interaction with the Babylonians on administrative and routine business matters at a local level.[28] Tero Alstola's wider survey of the material relating to Judahites in Babylonian during this period concludes similarly that the Judahites "did not live in isolation; they were in regular interaction with Babylonian and Persian officials and entrepreneurs in the land-for-service sector."[29] While it is true that over time some Judahites at the highest economic levels in these rural communities did expand their interactions with others, this seems to be both a development that takes some time after the initial settlement of the community in *āl-Yāhūdu* and to be restricted to a small, upper-echelon of families that develop business portfolios based on the labor—and very often debt—of their fellow Judahites.[30]

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[26] For evidence of some form of scribal training for the author(s) of Ezekiel, see Jonathan Stökl, "'A Youth Without Blemish, Handsome, Proficient in all Wisdom, Knowledgeable and Intelligent': Ezekiel's Access to Babylonian Culture', 223-52 in J. Stökl and C. Waerzeggers (eds.) *Exile and Return: The Babylonian Context* (BZAW 478; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015) and Abraham Winitzer, "Assyriology and Jewish Studies in Tel Aviv: Ezekiel among the Babylonian literati", 163-216 in U. Gabbay and S. Secunda (eds.) *Encounters by the Rivers of Babylon: Scholarly Conversations between Jews, Iranians and Babylonians in Antiquity* (TSAJ 160; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

[27] Tero Alstola, *Judeans in Babylonia*, 262, concludes that the role of forcibly displaced communities in the economy of the Babylonain Empire 'brought them under close supervision by the state'.

[28] Pearce and Wunsch, *Documents of Judean Exiles*, 99.

[29] Alstola, *Judeans in Babylonia*, 272.

[30] Alstola, *Judeans in Babylonia*, 270-1.

Furthermore, tablet No. 2 (ca. 587 BCE) from the Sofer collection speaks of a debt to be settled by Ṣidiqī-Yāma with Bēl-šar-uṣur. As the creditor in the situation, it seems that Bēl-šar-uṣur was acting as "an intermediary" between a group of farmers who owed payment to the Babylonian authorities in return for the land they were entrusted to farm. Elsewhere, Bēl-šar-uṣur appears as Yāḫu-šar-uṣur. His dual identity indicates he is a Judahite working for the Babylonian royal administration.[31] This evidence indicates perhaps as few as five years after the forced displacement of elite Judahites to the Babylonian countryside, Bēl/Yāḫu-šar-uṣur operates as an important link between the Judahite involuntary migrant community and the imperial power that had settled these involuntary migrants to farm the land. In short, he demonstrates the existence of such cultural translators—educated persons who could facilitate transactions between the imperial state apparatus and the forcibly deported, indentured workforce on which the state depended to reap the profit it desired from these forcibly displaced, contingently settled, isolated communities.

To perform this task Bēl/Yāḫu-šar-uṣur has to be linguistically capable of shuttling between languages (Akkadian, Hebrew, and Aramaic) in order to broker the working relationship across the lines that divided the imperial host community and these newcomers.[32] Such figures likely emerged through initiative and business acumen over time; but, what about when the forcibly displaced communities first arrived in the Babylonian countryside? Imperially coordinated building projects and economic programmes require planning, organization, and careful supervision to ensure those plans are carried out as intended. A good deal of the local organization might have been left to the involuntary migrant communities from Judah and other places, but surely not without oversight from the Babylonians. This approach requires

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[31] See the discussions in Laurie E. Pearce, "Identifying Judeans and Judean Identity in the Babylonian Evidence", in J. Stökl and C. Waerzeggers (eds.) *Exile and Return: The Babylonian Context* (BZAW 478; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 26-7, and Alstola, *Judeans in Babylonia*, 159-63.

[32] Alstola, *Judeans in Babylonia*, 249, notes that even transactions among immigrants that apparently had no connection to Babylonians had to be documented in cuneiform, indicating the need for both Babylonian scribes, but also members of the immigrant community familiar with such practices.

someone from the involuntary migrant community to provide such an interface.[33]

Who would the Babylonians have first identified to serve in such a mediating role? Perhaps someone with an excellent education, training in reading and writing, and knowledge of how to organize people and collect tax payments. In other words, a person with the particular skills of a priest.

The prevalence of Akkadian loan words in the book called Ezekiel takes on a new importance from this perspective. It remains impossible to know for sure how and why the author(s) of Ezekiel knew a significant number of Akkadian loan words, Babylonian religious ideas, and mythic imagery.[34] Jonathan Stökl ascertains from the evidence that the author(s) of Ezekiel had access to some form of cuneiform scribal training, even though this "appears to contradict what we already know" about foreigners receiving access to such education.[35] Stökl expresses dissatisfaction with the results of the investigation, and wonders if there is a "better explanation" for the data.[36]

The cumulative evidence from the *āl-Yāhūdu* corpus, the book of Ezekiel, and the social scientific study of involuntary migration points towards the likelihood that someone from the forcibly displaced Judahite community required basic training in order to serve as the administrative link between the Babylonian imperial apparatus and the newly arrived community. It is speculative to suggest this, but it is not unsubstantiated speculation. Rather, like Stökl's own assessment, it rests on a cumulative case that offers a potential explanation for the currently inexplicable evidence available to scholars. In short, given the other evidence that a "camp" setting shapes the book called Ezekiel, it is reasonable to suggest that a better explanation for

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[33] On the role of this practice in contingently settled, isolated populations, see Harrell-Bond, *Imposing Aid: Emergency Assistance to Refugees* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 98-117, especially 98-99.

[34] See Jonathan Stökl, "'A Youth Without Blemish'", 232-50 for a succinct list of examples. Abraham Winitzer, "Assyriology and Jewish Studies in Tel Aviv: Ezekiel among the Babylonian Literati," in *Encounters by the Rivers of Babylon: Scholarly Conversations between Jews, Iranians, and Babylonians in Antiquity* (ed. U. Gabbay and S. Secunda; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), 163-216, offers another helpful discussion of the matter.

[35] Stökl, "'A Youth Without Blemish'", 252.

[36] Ibid.

a member of the Jerusalemite learned elite in Chebar knowing key aspects of Babylonian scribal culture derives from the need for him to acquire the requisite familiarity with cuneiform language and Babylonian legal practices needed to serve as the initial link between the imperial administration and the captive Judahite workers.

A Symbol of It All: YHWH, the Refugee

Back on firmer ground, there is no doubt that one figure towers over everything else in Ezekiel: YHWH. It is relevant, then, that Louis Stulman frames YHWH's departure from the Jerusalem temple in Ezek 8–11 as evidence the deity is "an outcast in solidarity with the diasporic community" as a "displaced person" in Babylonia.[37] Ruth Poser argues that Ezekiel's "'strange peculiarities' make perfect sense when viewed as direct interventions of Yahweh, a deity determined to recover from his own trauma—the 'trauma' of being forced to abandon his own people."[38]

What scholars have not apprehended is how Ezekiel's depiction of YHWH's migration reflects the particular experience of those migrants residing in a camp setting. The destruction of the Jerusalem temple sees YHWH depart the ancestral homeland and take up residence in a confined, isolated locale segregated from outsiders: the מקדש מעט. How appropriate for the patron deity of a community of involuntary migrants forcibly settled in an isolated, segregated context to end up in the same predicament. Commentators debate whether מקדש מעט has a chronological meaning—denoting a temporary sanctuary—or describes magnitude—conveying a diminished sanctuary. Both connotations are relevant.

The reduced boundaries of this sanctuary mirror the experience of the Judahite involuntary migrants. Instead of the YHWH of the first exodus who, as pillar of fire and column of smoke, boldly leads the people, roaming without restriction, Ezekiel's YHWH remains in a little sanctuary, a bounded place not of YHWH's own choosing,

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[37] Louis Stulman, "Ezekiel as Disaster/Survival Literature: Speaking on Behalf of the Losers," in Mark J. Boda, Frank R. Ames, John Ahn, and Mark Leuchter (eds.) *The Prophets Speak on Forced Migration*, eds. (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 142–3.

[38] Summary from Michael S. Moore, "Review of Poser, *Der Ezechielbuch als Trauma-Literatur*," *RBL* 4 (2015): 3.

cordoned off from outsiders, just like the Judahites in Chebar. The limited chronological period of this sojourn reflects the millenarian hopes of return prevalent among involuntary migrants living in an isolated setting. YHWH resides in a meagre, isolated setting now—but a return to YHWH's land and to YHWH's cleansed temple exists *in nuce* within the temporal connotations of the מקדש מעט. The polysemy of Ezek 11:16 reflects an encamped community hoping for a grand, millenarian return home.

  The central figure of the book called Ezekiel, YHWH, shares the human experience of the forcibly displaced Judahite community addressed in Ezekiel. When the Judahite involuntary migrants along the Chebar canal look to the divine realm they see their present and their future: forcibly encamped, isolated in an ethnically homogenous community, they remain distinct from the threatening outsider; hardened in ethnocentric conviction by this experience, they are thus uncompromising about the community's identity, rejecting anything that suggests an open attitude to outsiders or bears a whiff of integration with their practices; resigned to this isolated, curtailed social context, but only for a limited time, they exuberantly voice a millenarian hope for a return to a cleansed land and the restoration of life there.

Conclusion

In the end, this success of this investigation does not rest on whether the answer to its title question is yes or no. Many will remain skeptical of employing such contemporary terminology, even if the underlying concepts inherent in it offer striking resemblance to Ezekiel's setting. Many will also be unconvinced of the role proposed for the figure of Ezekiel: semi-trained intermediary between imperial state and involuntary migrant community.

  The success of the exploration lies in the clear finding that there are a wealth of insights to be gained by engaging deeply with the social scientific study of involuntary migration in order to illuminate not just the book called Ezekiel, but the varied Judahite experience of life in Babylonia during the sixth century BCE and the texts inspired by those experiences. This essay underscores the need for a far more

detailed taxonomy to describe the experiences of migration homogenously grouped into "the exile" to enable the extant texts and material culture to speak to scholars in new and previously unexplored ways.[39]

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[39] See C. A. Strine, "Is Exile Enough: Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Need for a Taxonomy of Involuntary Migration", *HeBAI* 7:3 (2018): 289-315 for further discussion of this point.