

JUDAH IN THE NEO-BABYLONIAN PERIOD

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Judah in the Neo-Babylonian Period
The Archaeology of Desolation

JUDAH IN THE NEO-BABYLONIAN PERIOD
THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF DESOLATION

by

Avraham Faust

Society of Biblical Literature
Atlanta, Georgia

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To Iris

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PREFACE

*M*y first introduction to the debate over the reality in Judah in the sixth century B.C.E. was in 1998, when I heard Joseph Blenkinsopp presenting a paper on the Myth of the Empty Land in The Old Testament Seminar, at the Faculty of Theology, University of Oxford. Later in 1998 I attended a conference in Tel Aviv University on the pottery of the sixth century (organized by Oded Lipschits). Generally speaking, the claims that the Land was not empty were seen as very convincing, although during the discussion I added a reservation that there were also changes, for example the disappearance of the four room house after the end of the Iron Age. In 2001 Oded Lipschits organized another, much larger, conference on the Judah in the Neo Babylonian period, at Tel Aviv University, and he invited me to participate. Specifically, he asked to present a paper on the rural settlements of the Iron Age (which was the topic of my master's thesis). I gave the invitation much thought, and after some time came with the idea that we can examine continuity between the Iron Age and the Persian period in the rural sector. I presented this paper at the conference, and later published it (Faust 2003b).

This is how I was introduced into the study of this fascinating period, and gradually came to hold firm views on the various elements in the ensuing debate. In the course of the coming years I published a few more papers on this troubled era (e.g., Faust 2004b; 2007c), but soon realized that the debate, and the period, deserve a monograph in order to do them at least a partial justice.

I worked on this monograph for the better part of five years, from 2005 to 2010, with some periods of interruption. Some parts of the book were written already in 2005, but I abandoned the manuscript in early 2006, when the preparation for the expedition at Tel 'Eton were gathering speed and I simply couldn't afford the time to deal with the issue. I resumed working on the monograph only in 2007, and most of the research was completed during the early part of 2008, when I was on a Sabbatical leave from Bar-Ilan University, and was a Kennedy Leigh Fellow at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies (this book is the first part of a larger study on the Persian period that I initiated at the time). The

manuscript was completed later, in the course of 2009, it was accepted for publication at the SBL in 2010, and was edited and updated in early 2011. Only partial updating was possible during the production process.

In the course of the research, I benefited greatly from comments of various colleagues, who read chapters or segments of this book or even the whole of it.

I would like to thank Professors Shlomo Bunimovitz, Aren Maeir, Gabriel Barkay, Garry Knoppers and the late Hanan Eshel for reading earlier versions of some parts of this monograph (either as chapters or as drafts of articles) and commenting on it. Alon De Groot, David Amit, Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah, Hagit Turge and David Vanderhooft allowed me to quote unpublished data. I am also grateful to Hugh Williamson, Barry Cunliffe, Susan Sherratt, Joshua Schwartz, Zeev Safrai, and Avi Shveka who discussed many of the ideas expressed in the various chapters. Special thanks are due to Liz Fried, who read the entire manuscript and commented on it. Needless to say, the responsibility for the ideas expressed in this book and for any mistake or error is mine alone.

The maps were prepared by Yair Sapir, and the text was edited by Rebecca Goldberg. I am grateful to them both.

I should also thank a few bodies and institutions that supported the research financially: The Dr. Simon Krauthammer chair in Archaeology, the Moskovitz foundation, the Kuschitsky foundation, and especially the Ingeborg Rennert Center for Jerusalem Studies—all in the Martin (Szusz) Department of Land of Israel Studies and Archaeology, Bar-Ilan University.

Most of the manuscript was completed at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, and I am grateful to the center for granting me the Kennedy Leigh Fellowship and for supplying me with the suitable environment for completing most of the research.

Finally, for giving me the time and peace of mind to work on this book, I would like to thank my family—my children, Kama, Marvah, and Yannai, and especially my wife Iris. This book is dedicated to her.

ABBREVIATIONS

AA	<i>Archaologischer Anzeiger</i>
AAR	<i>African Archaeological Review</i>
AASOR	Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
ANES	Ancient Near Eastern Studies
AWE	Ancient West and East
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAIAS	<i>Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BABESCH	<i>BABESCH, Annual Papers on Mediterranean Archaeology</i>
CAH	Cambridge Ancient History
CAJ	<i>Cambridge Archaeological Journal</i>
CEA	Companion Encyclopedia of Archaeology
DDD	<i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i>
EAEHL	Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land
ErIsr	Eretz-Israel
ESI	Excavations and Surveys in Israel
Hen	Henoch
HS	Hebrew Studies
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal for the American Oriental Society</i>
JAR	<i>Journal of Archaeological Research</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JCS	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
JEA	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>

JESHO	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
JHebS	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
JHS	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
JMA	<i>Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
JSRS	<i>Judea and Samaria Research Studies</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
Levant	<i>Levant</i>
NEA	<i>Near Eastern Archaeologist</i>
NEAEHL	The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land
NSJ	New Studies on Jerusalem
OEANE	Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East
OJA	<i>Oxford Journal of Archaeology</i>
Or	<i>Orientalia</i>
PEQ	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
Qad	<i>Qadmoniot</i>
RB	<i>Revue biblique</i>
RBL	<i>Review of Biblical Literature</i>
TA	<i>Tel Aviv</i>
UF	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
WO	<i>Die Welt des Orients</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZDPV	<i>Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>

INTRODUCTION

*I*n the summer of 586 B.C.E., the Babylonian army defeated Judah and conquered Jerusalem.¹ The Temple was destroyed, and Judah lost its independence. The Babylonian conquest left clear archaeological marks and destruction layers in many sites including Jerusalem, Lachish, Ein Gedi, Kh. Rabud, Arad, Tel Ira, Ramat Rahel, and many others (fig. 1).² The destruction of Judah and mainly Jerusalem that is also recorded in the books of 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Jeremiah, Lamentations and others, was a traumatic event for the population of Judah. Thus, the opening verses of Lamentations (1:1–3) begin:

How lonely sits the city, that once was full of people. How like a widow she has become, she that was great among the nations. She that was a princess among the provinces has become a vassal. She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks; among all her lovers she has no one to comfort her; all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they have become her enemies. Judah had gone into exile with suffering and hard servitude; she lives now among the nations, and finds no resting place; her pursuers have all overtaken her in the midst of her distress.

The Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem is, no doubt, an important historical event. For scholars, this date usually marks the end of the period of the Monarchy or even the end of the Iron Age and the beginning of the exilic period. For many,

1. The exact date of the destruction has received a considerable amount of discussion (e.g., Malamat 1983, 243–47, and many references; see also Cazelles 1983; Coogan and Tadmor 1988). This book will follow the generally accepted 586 B.C.E. date. This is done simply for reasons of convenience. The exact dating carries no weight for the arguments discussed in this book and is irrelevant for the conclusions.

2. Jerusalem: e.g., Shiloh 1984; Lachish: e.g., Ussishkin 2004; Ein Gedi: B. Mazar 1993; Stern 2007; Kh. Rabud: Kochavi 1974; 1993b; Arad: M. Aharoni 1993; Tel Ira: Beit Arieah 1993a; 1997; Ramat Rahel: Aharoni 1993; but see now Lipschits, et al. 2009, 70.



Fig. 1. A Babylonian destruction layer in the City of David, Jerusalem (Shiloh 1984, plate 32:2; courtesy of the Institute of Archaeology, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem).

this date has been regarded as a “watershed.”³ But what was the reality in Judah after the 586 B.C.E. events, in the period known alternatively as the exilic period, the Neo-Babylonian period, or simply the sixth century B.C.E.? The Bible informs us that people remained in the land but gives the impression that they were relatively few and unimportant. Indeed, until recently, the period was viewed as a time of great demographic and cultural decline.⁴ This view, however, has been severely criticized over the last decade and a half. Some scholars, mainly following Barstad’s *The Myth of the Empty Land*, have accepted the notion that there was not much change in Judah after the fall of Jerusalem.⁵ They believe that only a small minority of Judeans were exiled, and for most of the population, life continued after 586 B.C.E. just as before.⁶ According to these scholars, most of the population lived in the rural sector and was unharmed by the war and the subsequent

3. E.g., Bright 1972, 343; Redford 1992, 471–72; Schniedewind 2004, 139; Liverani 2005; Middlemas 2005, 1.

4. Noth 1960, 296; Kenyon 1965, 298–302; Bright 1972, 343–44; Aharoni 1979; Mazar 1990; Stern 2001; see also Na’aman 1995, 114–15; 2000, 42–44.

5. Barstad 1996; also Carroll 1992; and see already Lemche 1988, 175–79.

6. E.g., Lipschits 1997b; 1998b; 2003a; 2003b; 2005; Blenkinsopp 2002a; 2002b; 2002c; see also Middlemas 2005.

exile. This new understanding of the reality in sixth-century B.C.E. Judah has been criticized, with respect to its understanding of the biblical texts as well as its interpretation of the Babylonian policies, and especially over the way these scholars treated the archaeological evidence from Judah.⁷

Indeed, the evolving debate over the settlement and demographic reality in the sixth century has brought the archaeological evidence to the fore. Unfortunately, as is widely known, no material culture specific to the Babylonian period has yet been identified, and so the debate seems unresolved.

STUDY OF THE NEO-BABYLONIAN PERIOD: SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The period succeeding the Babylonian conquest of Judah, namely, the exilic period, is extremely important for biblical scholars, and various assumptions have been made on the exilic period's contribution to the biblical corpus.⁸ The demographic and political reality in sixth-century Judah became a crucial issue for scholars trying to understand when parts of the Bible were written (mainly in the exilic and postexilic eras) and where they were written (i.e., in Judah or in exile).⁹ The question of whether Judah was relatively "empty" or had a large and complex society is of significance for scholars who find it essential to understand which parts of the biblical corpus were written in Judah.

Most scholars in the past, although not viewing the land as "empty," accepted the exile as a historical fact and viewed the destruction as significant. Hence, Bright spoke about the "calamity of 587 B.C.E." (1972, 343), and Albertz devoted a large section to the "Babylonian Golah" (2003, 99–111). Only few followed C. C. Torrey (1910 [1970], 285–300; 1930, 24–44; 1954, xxv), who believed that the exile was insignificant. Torrey wrote that "(S)o far as the Jews of the Babylonian deportation are concerned, it is not likely that they ever exercised any considerable influence on the Jews in Judea" (1910 [1970], 288). Elsewhere he added that "the fact is, of course, that Nebuchadnezzar and his officers carried away only those on whom they could lay their hands," (290) noting that those were relatively few. According to him the exile affected only a small part of the population, and

7. Stern 2000b; 2004; Oded 2003; Vanderhooff 2003a; Faust 2003b; 2004b; Oded and Faust 2006.

8. Jansen 1956; Thomas 1961; Ackroyd 1968; Seitz 1989; Barstad 1996; Albertz 2003; Lipschits 2005; Middlemas 2005; see also Bright 1972, 347–60; Smith 1989; 1997; Sanders 1997.

9. When: e.g., Ackroyd 1968; Seitz 1989; Albertz 2003; Middlemas 2005; see more in the summary); where: e.g., Middlemas 2005; 2009, and references.

most inhabitants returned to their homes and continued to live in the same way as before the Babylonian conquest (also Torrey 1910 [1970], 300). Torrey (1954, xxvii–xxviii) also believed that there was no significant return. Notable among those influenced to some degree by Torrey in the recent generation (although more moderately) is Hans Barstad (e.g., 1996: 21–22),¹⁰ and following him Lipschits (e.g., 2003a: 365; 2003b: 186–94, 300; 2005: 267), and others (e.g., Carroll 1998). I will return to this issue below.

In the meantime I would like to stress that, although biblical scholars concentrated on discussing the composition and/or editorial process of the biblical text and did not usually address the “reality on the ground” in ancient Judah, all the above discussions were, naturally, based on assumptions regarding the situation in Judah in the exilic and postexilic period. Thus, for example, recent attempts to locate the place of the authorship of the texts that are attributed to this period (e.g., Barstad 1996; Albertz 2003; Middlemas 2005) rely heavily on the “reality on the ground” in Judah. Hence interest among biblical scholars is growing concerning the physical (archaeological) reality in Judah.

While the disinterest until recently of biblical scholars in the physical reality in Judah might be expected, it is surprising that archaeologists did not pay much attention to this period. The literature reflects this gap. Many archaeological and historical books covering the period only briefly mention the Neo-Babylonian period—sometimes devoting to it no more than a paragraph or two—after discussing the destruction of Judah and before mentioning the Persian period. For example, after devoting a long discussion to the destruction, Kenyon (1965, 298) only wrote a paragraph on the Neo-Babylonian period. The same is true for Albright’s (1960b) important work, and even in the monumental ten-volume series, *The History of Eretz Israel*, the period seems to fall between the cracks. In the volume on *Israel and Judah in the Biblical Period*, the chapter on the Iron Age ends with 586 B.C.E., and the chapter on the Persian period starts in 538 B.C.E. Oded (1984), who wrote a detailed chapter on the period of the Monarchy, devoted a mere page and a half to “the land of Judah after the destruction” (although it was beyond the “official” timeframe of the chapter). Most of his discussion deals with the short episode of Gedaliah, the governor of the remaining population in Judah after the destruction of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 25:22–26; Jer 40–43). Only the last paragraph addresses 582–539 B.C.E., merely to state that not much is known about the period. Most recent works tend to be smaller in the chronological scope. Hence, works on the “biblical period” end in 586 B.C.E. (e.g.,

10. It should be stressed that Barstad is careful to state that one should not follow Torrey in denying any return at all (e.g., Barstad 1996, 43–44, 79) and it is clear that he is not endorsing Torrey’s view in full. See more below.

Mazar 1990), while those on the Second Temple period usually begin with the Persian period (e.g., Avi Yonah 1966).

The most notable exception is Weinberg's (1969) study of the archaeology of the postexilic period, which concentrated on the sixth century. This study, which reflects the state of academic knowledge in the late 1960s, however, did not initiate further archaeological discussion. Barkay (1992), who included the sixth century in the Iron Age, might also be viewed as an exception. However, he devoted only a brief discussion (less than two pages) to this period, probably due to the lack of data (see more below). Interest in the Neo-Babylonian period was initiated only following the current debate¹¹ and even this, as far as the archaeological community is concerned, only to a limited extent.

The reason for this archaeological neglect is the dearth of available information on the nature of this period. Hardly any excavated site or stratum was dated to this period, and this era was subsequently regarded as a period of great decline. Most of the limited data available is derived from a few tombs. Only in the land of Benjamin to the north of Jerusalem, which was saved from the Babylonian destruction, were settlement layers dated to the sixth century B.C.E.¹² Only minimal remains were identified as belonging to the sixth century B.C.E. throughout the rest of Judah. This came as no surprise to most archaeologists. The Babylonian campaigns were regarded as responsible for this relative emptiness, and this is indeed echoed in most brief historical and archaeological treatments of the period. The following are just a few examples.

Albright referred to the destruction of cities and added that "there is not a single known case where a town of Judah proper was continuously occupied through the exilic period" (1960b, 141–42). Bright wrote that "as archaeological evidence eloquently testifies, all, or virtually all, of the fortified towns in the heartland of Judah were razed to the ground, in most cases not to be rebuilt for many years to come" (1972, 344). More recently, Stern also referred to the lack of archaeological data from this period (2001), and Mazar's monumental work stated that the Babylonian period was not "sufficiently known archaeologically" (and devoted fewer than two pages to it; 1990, 549). He added that only north of Jerusalem, in the land of Benjamin, "there was no severe destruction, and life continued under Babylonian rule" (460). The dearth of finds is reflected in the work of Barkay, who is one of the few that devoted specific efforts to this period (he even included it within the Iron Age). Barkay referred to the lack of finds by

11. Stern (2001) devoted 48 pages to the topic.

12. E.g., Malamat 1950; see also Mazar 1990, 548; Barkay 1992, 372; Stern 1983; 2001; and now also Lipschits 1999; 2003a; 2003b; the issue will be discussed at length in ch. 9.

stating that the period's material culture was known mainly through surveys and from burials (1992, 372–73; more below).

This short survey demonstrates that from an archaeological perspective, the land of Judah was regarded as devastated during the sixth century. The population was concentrated in limited regions; therefore, the archaeological record provided little to write about. This scarcity of finds matched scholars' expectations. The view that the period's material culture was limited was shared by practically all archaeologists, from scholars like Watzinger (1935), Albright (1940; 1960b; 1963), Kenyon (1965), and Aharoni (1979), to more recent archaeologists like Shiloh (1989), Stager (1996; see also King and Stager 2001), Mazar (1990), Barkay (1992), Herzog (1997b, 278), Dever (2005, 291–94), Master (2007), Holladay (2009, 87–88); Finkelstein (2010, 46), and Stern (2001).¹³ In particular, Stern's works (e.g., 1982; 1983; 1987; 2001) have greatly increased the importance of the Persian period in comparison with previous publications (ch. 5), but he stressed that the Babylonian period was underpopulated.

Although these scholars did not treat the land as empty (ch. 8), it is clear that there is an archaeological consensus that the region was devastated. This consensus came under heavy criticism recently, mainly from biblical scholars. Already in 1988, for example, Lemche (1988, 175–76) stressed that “the sources all agree that a remnant was left behind,” and although this was composed of the poorest segment of Judahite society, it “may have included as much as 90 percent of the population.” Carrol (1992) stressed the creation of the “myth of the empty land” as a dominant idea in biblical writings, but he did not compare/contrast his ideas with the finds “on the ground” in Judah. This line of thinking was developed and elaborated by Barstad (1996; 2003) and later by Lipschits (2003a; 2003b; 2005). While not accepting Torrey's theory in full, those scholars were greatly influenced by him. For example, Barstad (1996, 21–23) referred to Torrey's works as “extreme,” but wrote that

even if he was certainly not correct in every respect, for instance in his dating of Isa 40–55 and in his claim that there was hardly any exile to speak of, or any return whatsoever, he did make several important points which cannot easily be dismissed. Among these are the stress on the importance of those who were left behind in Judah, and an awareness of the exaggerated importance generally attached to such ideological strategies as “exile” and “return” (22).

13. Notably, while archaeologists like Barkay (e.g., 1993) attempted to archaeologically identify the period under discussion, they did not claim that the region prospered, or that most of the population continued to live in the region “without any change,” and accept the common view regarding the scarcity of settlement. Barkay's views will be mentioned in more detail below.

Barstad also lamented the neglect of Torrey's contribution, and claimed that recent scholarship proved him right with regard to the stress on continuity rather than break in Judah following the events in 586 B.C.E. (22). Barstad's 1996 publication was the most significant contribution to the stress on continuity rather than break. Barstad attacked the notion that the land was empty, and tried to deconstruct the consensus that was based on what he called "the myth of the empty land" (following others, e.g., Carrol 1992). He attempted to examine the biblical texts, the archaeological finds, and additional data on the Neo-Babylonian Empire in order to shed light on the reality in Judah after the destruction of the temple.

As far as the biblical texts were concerned, Barstad attempted to show how the myth of the empty land developed and influenced modern scholarship (1996, 25–27). He believed previous scholarship was based on texts, which were "much more to be regarded as religious and political propaganda than historical documents" (44, regarding the books of Ezra and Nehemiah). When discussing the archaeological evidence, Barstad examined surveys for evidence of the settlement that must have existed in Judah in the sixth century (47–55), since "if the arguments concerning a continuing settlement in Judah during the 'exilic' period presented above [i.e., his chapter on the biblical evidence] are correct, we should expect to find some evidence of material continuation" (47). He also discussed Transjordan where there was evidence of continuity (57–60), and then went on to discuss the Neo-Babylonian Empire and Judah (61–76). Barstad argued that it was against the interests of the Babylonian Empire to destroy Judah, and that the latter had an important role in the Empire's economy. Barstad summarized, "Jerusalem after the fall of Jerusalem constituted yet another wheel in the much bigger economic machinery of the Neo-Babylonian empire" (79).

The bottom line of Barstad's study was his claim that Judah was not empty in the sixth century. The vast majority of the population continued to live just as they had before the fall of Jerusalem, with practically no changes following the Babylonian conquest. The emptiness of the land was a myth created in the Persian period (14–45).

In light of overwhelming evidence from excavations, Barstad acknowledged that the urban centers of the Iron Age were destroyed by the Babylonians (1996, 47). However, he claimed that the large majority of Judah's population lived in villages and hamlets that were not affected by the Babylonian conquest. For this "great majority of the population" (Barstad 1996, 42),¹⁴ life went on after 586 B.C.E. just as before (1996, 41, 79, 81). He felt Judah was simply part of a prosperous Neo-Babylonian Empire (1996, 79).

14. Some 90 percent of the population according to Lemche (1988, 176) and some 75 percent according to Kelle (2007, 83).

It should be stressed that as a biblical scholar Barstad was interested in this period because of theological–biblical considerations. As he acknowledged, “my present interest in the exilic period was caused primarily by the claim, originating in the nineteenth century, that no economic, cultural or religious activity could have taken place in Judah during this period because the country simply ceased to exist” (1996, 45). As Middlemas observed (2005, 20; not in a negative manner), Barstad’s interest was “part of this wider desire to locate Deutero-Isaiah in Judah rather than Babylon.” Therefore, he “sought to redeem Judah from the wasteland to which it had been relegated by historians.”

Barstad’s work was very influential among biblical scholars, who were interested in the period because it was considered to have been the time in which much of the biblical corpus was written.¹⁵ Many biblical scholars and historians simply followed the lead and did not devote an independent study to the reality “on the ground” in sixth-century Judah (e.g., Albertz 2003; see also Middlemas 2005). Few of those who followed Barstad attempted to study the archaeological reality as revealed by surveys and excavations. Most notable of those who developed this line of research is Oded Lipschits, whose studies incorporate a great deal of detailed archaeological data.

Following Barstad, Lipschits accepted that after the Babylonian conquest there was a break in the urban sector, but not in the rural one (2003b, 222–23; 2005, 190, 368). Lipschits’s studies were more detailed than Barstad’s. While Lipschits, unlike Barstad, acknowledged that there was a significant demographic decline in the sixth century, he claimed that it was gradual (see ch. 5), that there was significant rural settlement, and continuity in many important traits during the transition from the Iron Age to the Persian period. Thus, Lipschits claimed that the majority of the population in the northern Judean mountains and the area of Benjamin remained in their homes after the Babylonian conquest, and they continued to use the same material culture just as before 586 B.C.E. According to Lipschits (1998b, 21), “in the Judean mountains and Benjamin, the vast majority of the population remained, and most villages continued to exist, with changes and adjustments that the new military, political, and economical struc-

15. Some of these scholars do not go beyond the interpretation of the texts and do not refer to the presumed situation in Judah during the sixth century including: who remained in Judah, where they lived, and how they lived (e.g., Carroll 1992). Others try to present a view on how life continued at the time, but they do not support their claim by material evidence (e.g., Berquist 1995, 15–18). Barstad was the first notable exception. He tried to locate these peoples and activities in the “real world.” For this reason, it is difficult to relate archaeologically to works such as Carroll’s, as there is no real archaeological data or scenario that can be checked.

ture required.”¹⁶ Lipschits also believed that the area was of great economic importance for the Babylonians (2005, 69).

Finkelstein and Silberman, following Lipschits, believed that at least seventy percent of the population of Iron Age Judah remained and lived in the region during the Neo-Babylonian period (2001, 306–8). According to their figures, this amounted to over 56,000 people (see, however, Finkelstein 2010 for a contrasting assessment and figures). Many biblical scholars, such as Albertz (2003), Berquist (1995), and Middlemas (2005), presented similar views.

Although those scholars had different interests, and despite some disparity in opinion (e.g., regarding the percentage of the population that continued to live in Judah after the events of 586 B.C.E.), they all stressed continuity between the Iron Age and Neo-Babylonian period and rejected the older consensus that Judah was devastated at the time. Therefore, they will be referred to in this book as the continuity school. It must be stressed that the differences among them are minor when compared with the differences between them as a group, and with the group of scholars who upheld the traditional view (or a modified version of it) of Judah after 586 B.C.E. It is therefore logical to treat them as a school.

The continuity school has come under heavy criticism.¹⁷ This criticism related to Barstad’s (and his followers’) treatment of the biblical texts, his understanding of the reality in the Neo-Babylonian Empire, and his treatment of the archaeological data.¹⁸ Many aspects of this criticism will be discussed in later chapters. Suffice it to say, the common view among archaeologists is that the Babylonian conquest was a significant event that led to a collapse and left the area in desolation.¹⁹ King and Stager wrote about the Babylonian “scorched-earth policy” (2001, 251–58), and added, “clearly the population of Judah was severely diminished. West of the Jordan it is difficult not only to find a settlement site that continues to be occupied during the period (586–525 B.C.E.), but also to point to individual artifacts that fill the gap” (257). Aharoni wrote that “the destruction of

16. Note that in most of his writings, Lipschits attributed settlement continuity and prosperity mainly to the northern part of the Judean highlands and the region of Benjamin; e.g., Lipschits 2003b, 222; 2005, 190–91, 196, 258, 374.

17. See, e.g., Vanderhooft 2001; 2003a; Oded 2003; Oded and Faust 2006; Faust 2003b; 2004b; 2007c; Stern 2001; 2002; 2004; Schniedewind 2004, 141–47.

18. Treatment of the biblical texts: e.g., Oded 2003; Oded and Faust 2006; understanding of the reality in the Neo-Babylonian Empire: e.g., Vanderhooft 2001; 2003a; treatment of the archaeological data: e.g., Stern 2002; 2004; Faust 2003b; 2004b; 2007c; Oded and Faust 2006; see also Master 2007; Schniedewind 2004, 141–47.

19. E.g., Shiloh 1989; Mazar 1990; Stager 1996; Herzog 1997b, 278; King and Stager 2001; Stern 2001; Faust 2003b; 2004b; 2007c; Dever 2005, 291–294; Master 2007; Holladay 2009, 87–88; Finkelstein 2010, 46.

the 587/6 B.C.E. was total. No place that has been examined in the Shephelah or in the hill country escaped its fate except Mizpah, to which the seat of government was transferred with the destruction of Jerusalem..." (1978, 279). Finkelstein recently assessed the population of the Persian period and concluded that the population was so limited that the demographic estimates "work against scholars who tend to belittle the scope of the catastrophe which befell Judah in 586 BC" (2010, 46). Mazar claimed that the prosperity of the seventh century "came to an end with the Babylonian conquest of 586 B.C.E., when most Judean cities were destroyed and abandoned" (1990, 438). After reviewing the evidence for destruction (458–60), he concluded that "only in the land of Benjamin ... was the Babylonian conquest not oblitative." Holladay expressed a similar view, writing "there is virtually no clearly defined period that may be called Babylonian" (2009, 88), and then he quoted Stern (2001, 350) saying that "it was a time from which almost no material finds remain." Holladay then added the words (alluding to the present debate), "an empty land!" (2009, 88). A similar view was expressed by the historian M. Liverani, who referred to "a real overall collapse" (2005, 231–34, esp. 232), and that "it is thus easy to understand how, seen from Babylon, Palestine seemed to be an 'empty' land, a country of miserable squatters camped in the ruins of ancient cities, infested by nomadic incursions, a country abandoned by God and humans" (234).²⁰ The debate, however, continues.

THIS BOOK

This debate triggered the present monograph. The book's central aim is to reexamine the archaeological reality in the Neo-Babylonian period, mainly in the territories of the former (Iron Age) kingdom of Judah, in order to shed new light on this troubled period. The chapters will aim to resolve the impasse, by expanding research into new avenues and examining new data, as well as by offering new methods to examine older data. On this basis, the book will arrive at new insights about life in the region. Notably, while scrutinizing the evidence regarding Judah in the sixth century B.C.E., this monograph will concentrate mainly on the archaeological aspect of the debate. Before presenting the structure of this book, however, a few preliminary notes regarding chronology and the difficulties we face are in order.

20. Needless to say, many historians share this view. See, e.g., Na'aman 1995, 114–15; 2000, 42–44.

Most archaeologists use 586 B.C.E. as the traditional date that ends the Iron Age II.²¹ A few archaeologists, most notably Gabriel Barkay, have challenged this view. According to Barkay (1992, 372–73; 1993), the date 586 B.C.E. is historical and marks the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, which means it is unlikely that changes in material culture would be so abrupt as to take place in the same year. Moreover, it is only Judah that experienced destruction and abrupt changes in 586 B.C.E.; most of the country was unaffected by the 586 events. Barkay, therefore, claimed that biblical descriptions of the destruction and its impact strongly influenced archaeological thinking and, hence, historic periodization. He believed that the processes by which the Iron Age material culture changed were much slower, and hence the point in time when the traditional Iron Age assemblages ended should be later, probably around 530–520 B.C.E. (Barkay 1992, 373; 1993). While not accepted by many archaeologists, this point, as we will see below, influenced the debate over the reality in Judah during the sixth century, since it allows (although it does not necessitate; Barkay accepts the traditional view) for many sites to have existed at the time—sites that were traditionally identified as late Iron Age, that is, ceramic assemblages generally attributed to the seventh century (for a late Iron Age assemblage, see fig. 2).

ATTEMPTS TO IDENTIFY THE POTTERY OF THE NEO-BABYLONIAN PERIOD

As we have seen, no clear-cut archaeological assemblages dated to the sixth century have been identified in Judah, and this makes the attempts to date sites to this period very problematic. Several explicit attempts, however, have been made in this direction, mainly since the heated debate on the nature of Neo-Babylonian Judah commenced.

Barkay postulated that a tomb he excavated in Keteph Hinnom was in use during this period (1998b). He tried to reconstruct the period's pottery forms based on this conclusion. Zorn also attempted to identify a stratum dated to this period at Tell en-Nasbeh (biblical Mizpah) and to define the period's assemblage (1993a; 1993b; 1997a; 1997b; 1997c; 2003). Finally, Lipschits tried to delineate the period's pottery in detail (1997b; 2005, 192–206). Much of the discussion was based on several layers dated to the sixth century at sites in Benjamin (see, e.g., Lapp 1978c; the finds in Benjamin will be discussed in ch. 9). These attempts, however, were all problematic.

Barkay's most important attempts at reconstructing sixth-century ceramic assemblages refers mainly to a sixth-century ceramic assemblage observed by

21. E.g., Amiran 1970; Aharoni 1978; Mazar 1990; Dever 1995; see also Stern 1993.



Fig. 2. A seventh-century B.C.E. assemblage from the Ashlar House, the city of David, Jerusalem (Shiloh 1984, plate 24:1; courtesy of the Institute of Archaeology, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem).

Barkay in his excavations at Keteph Hinom and in a few additional tombs (e.g., Barkay 1998b). This, however, is a putative assemblage. The tomb contained Iron Age and Persian period pottery. Barkay chose some forms, and on the basis of their assumed stage of development attributed them to the sixth century. While not impossible, this is not the appropriate method to identify the pottery of the sixth century, nor any century for that matter. To identify such pottery accurately, we need either a “sealed” assemblage at a stratified site, or one homogeneous assemblage from a unique context, such as a “single period” tomb. Only then could pottery be placed in its appropriate place within a relative chronology or sequence of pottery assemblages. In the absence of either, any selective attempt to identify the pottery of the sixth century is hazardous and cannot be proven.

As of yet, no form has been identified as unique to the sixth century. Given the lack of any pottery from a secure sixth century context, the failure to identify *fossiles directeurs*²² is expected. With the absence of such forms, attempts to identify the pottery of the period would require constructing hypothesized “battleship

22. A *fossil directeur*, or *type fossil*, is a geological term referring to a particular type of pottery form or artifact which is unique to one period or culture and is not found in other eras. Such a form is, therefore, diagnostic of one period only, and when it is found, even without context, one may conclude that this period is represented in the site.

curves”²³ for various vessels and then extrapolating a possible “typical” assemblage for the sixth century. Given the nature of the available data, such an exercise would be speculative. However, the exercise was never attempted by Barkay (who devoted insightful, but brief, discussion to the issue), or other scholars.

Zorn conducted the most detailed attempt to identify the pottery of the sixth century, and his was the only study that produced pottery plates (1993b; and esp. 2003). He used historical reasoning and architectural analysis to reconstruct a “new” stratum at Tell en-Nasbeh, which he dated to the sixth (and the fifth) century B.C.E. Zorn then attempted to trace the pottery of this period. However, this pottery was never found in homogeneous assemblages; it was always mixed. In some cases, the sixth-century putative assemblages included “earlier Iron Age material” (e.g., regarding cisterns 304 and 361; Zorn 2003, 429), and in other cases Persian period pottery. Some elements Zorn hypothesized dated to the Neo-Babylonian period without any stratigraphical basis (e.g., Zorn 2003, 433–42), and “virtually none of these pieces comes from a clean stratigraphical context” (433). Zorn’s attempts are exemplary (ch. 9), but even if his stratigraphical analysis is correct (and many doubt it; Herzog 1997b, 237; Faust 2005a, 81–83, n. 148; see also De Groot 2001, 79, and more below), all we have is an artificial assemblage. Even Zorn (2003, 445; 416–17) asserted, “we are left with a collage of objects mixed together that covers the entire life of the stratum” (i.e., sixth–fifth centuries B.C.E.). This reconstruction is insufficient to salvage the pottery of the sixth century, and the picture of sixth century pottery remains unclear.

Lipschits’s attempts were more detailed than Barkay and Zorn but were less grounded in specific data. His discussion was lengthy and detailed but did not include any pottery plates (2005, 192–206). Lipschits described many forms which showed continuity or development, mainly from the late Iron Age, to the Persian period, through the sixth century (198–203). However, he acknowledged that going beyond a description of each form and identifying the “real” pottery of the sixth century was a tricky issue (203): “nevertheless, familiarity with the assemblages of the late Iron Age and the Persian period is not sufficient to identify all the characteristics of the pottery assemblages that existed in the sixth century.” Therefore, Lipschits turned to the finds from “stratified” sites in Benja-

23. A battleship curve, or a battleship-shaped curve, refers to a curve that represents the popularity of vessels through time (the term is used in seriation). In most cases, a vessel is less frequent when it first appears, gradually becomes more popular, and then declines in popularity until it disappears (Deetz 1967, 26–33; Sinopoli 1991, 74–75; Orton, Tyres and Vince 1993, 190). The level of popularity (even at peak) and the speed with which each vessel gains and loses popularity changes from one vessel to another. The graphs that represent this popularity look like a World War II battleship, hence the name.

min (which are dated to the period under discussion by the majority of scholars), mainly at Tell el-Ful (Lipschits 2005, 204), and compared them to the pottery from Tell en-Nasbeh, Bethel, Gibeon, and so on (204–6).²⁴

However, he compared forms but not assemblages.²⁵ This is a problematic procedure, since the forms have a long life (a fact of which Lipschits is aware, given his discussion on pages 198–203). Using the existence of ceramic forms to raise claims about the “importance and significance of the sixth-century occupation at Gibeon” (205) is invalid (see also ch. 9). Unless some *fossiles directeurs* of the sixth century are discovered in sealed or clear contexts, no form can be dated exclusively to this century on the basis of such argumentation. Moreover, forms that, on the basis of their “development,” are “likely” to be common in the sixth century (a dangerous suggestion by itself) were in most cases already in use in the seventh century B.C.E.²⁶ Hence, those very forms can be found in sites that did not exist in the sixth century.²⁷ With a lack of *fossiles directeurs*, we must study assemblages, and not forms. Good assemblages, and not hypothesized ones, remain to be discovered.

Clearly, the attempts have failed to identify any *fossils directeurs* from the sixth century, and even the suggested assemblages are problematic since no clear and “clean” pottery assemblage from this era was excavated anywhere (see also De Groot 2001, and more below). This is not to say that there was no pottery at the time, but instead our archaeological resolution is not good enough, and we are currently unable to identify it (ch. 9).

Moreover, even the relative chronology of the assemblages is not straightforward. For example, the site at Bethel, located just north of Judah, is regarded by many as having clear evidence for sixth-century occupation (e.g., Kelso 1968, 37; 1993; see also Albright 1948; Lipschits 2005, 204–5; more below). Another site that is regarded as almost a site-type for this period is Tell en-Nasbeh (Zorn 1993a; 2003; Lipschits 2005, 204–5). Some scholars equated the pottery at

24. It should be noted that none of these sites provides a good assemblage from a domestic context that can be dated to the sixth century (e.g., Lipschits 2005, 204–6 for references; see ch. 9). The issue will be discussed further in ch. 9.

25. As we will see in ch. 9, in most of these sites no assemblages can be dated to the sixth century.

26. The same is true regarding his other comparisons, even if (supposed) “assemblages” are mentioned, e.g., at Keteph Hinom. To reiterate, only sealed or stratified contexts can be used to define assemblages. Any other attempt is artificial and involves an arbitrary collection of forms.

27. For some well-known forms, see the discussion of the Gibeon Jar: Kelm and Mazar (1985, 114–16); Mazar and Panitz-Cohen (2001, 79) (and already Amiran 1975); for the Iron Age date of the “carrot shaped” bottles, see Kelm and Mazar (1985, 114–15); Mazar and Panitz-Cohen (2001, 131). The issue will receive more detailed discussion in ch. 9.

both sites, and dated it to the sixth century (e.g., Lipschits 2005, 204–5). But as Albright (1948, 205) commented many years ago, “thanks to the fact that there was an important sixth-century occupation at Bethel after the final destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, we can say confidently that Tell en-Nasbeh was abandoned during most of this century, since the Bethel pottery in question is conspicuous by its absence” (see also ch. 9). Notably, Albright’s comment referred to the relative chronology, and should, therefore, be seriously considered. This shows that the issue of “identifying” the pottery of the sixth century is more difficult than it might appear at first glance,²⁸ and this is without even mentioning the criticism on the sixth century date for the pottery of Bethel itself.²⁹

This means that we cannot at the present state of knowledge, identify the pottery of the sixth century B.C.E. This has a devastating impact on our ability to use surveys in the study of this period. Many of the sites referred to in the debate over the reality of the sixth century are known from surveys. A major aim of identifying the pottery of the sixth century is therefore not only to date the few sites that were excavated, but to produce *fossiles directeurs* of the sixth century B.C.E. Discovering such “type finds” would help date sites that were only surveyed. This is especially important because the debate centers around the rural sector, and rural sites are usually only known from surveys (but see ch. 2).³⁰ In the absence of such “type finds” the surveys simply cannot identify the sixth century (through its pottery).

In sum, no pottery forms can currently be attributed with any degree of certainty to the sixth century B.C.E., and even all the suggested assemblages are putative (ch. 9). De Groot discussed the state of knowledge of Persian and Neo-Babylonian pottery:

28. The detailed discussions that attempt to organize a sequence of the assemblages (e.g., Lapp 1978a; 1978b; Lipschits 2005: 204–6, and references; see also Wright 1963) are nearly impossible. It is not viable to work in such a resolution, and the differences observed in the finds of different strata need not have anything to do with chronology. They can be attributed to regional factors or can even result from the different nature of the activity in the limited areas that were exposed. The issue will be discussed at more length in ch. 9.

29. The sixth-century date for the assemblage at Bethel (Kelso 1968, 37) was doubted by Dever (1971; 1997a), who claimed that the pottery did not come from a secure context, and it was more likely that the site ceased to exist in the time of the Babylonian conquest (see now also the criticism of Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz 2009; for a detailed discussion see ch. 9).

30. It must be noted that even if sealed or stratified sixth-century assemblages would be found in the future, it is possible that there will be no *fossiles directeurs* found, and all we will have are the assemblages. That would mean that even the identification of a Neo-Babylonian settlement through excavations might not solve the problem of identifying the period through surveys.

At the present state of research we have no (data from) stratified excavations that enable us to distinguish between early and late in the Persian period ceramic assemblages in the highlands ... Recently, several scholars have claimed that it is possible to define, archaeologically, the short period of time between the Babylonian destruction and the Persian conquest—i.e., the Neo-Babylonian period. A reexamination ... cast doubts on this claim (2001, 79; my translation).

After discussing the sites and loci involved, De Groot summarized that “the lack of ceramic assemblages that can be attributed to the Neo-Babylonian period in Judah” makes the attempts to identify this period in the surveys in Benjamin untenable (2001, 80; see also the cautionary note of Master 2007, 29–30). In light of the above it is clear that we cannot date sites to the sixth century B.C.E., and this leads us to the fundamental “problem” of the archaeology of the sixth century B.C.E.: the dearth of finds attributed to this century.

FOCUSING THE PROBLEM: EXPLAINING THE DEARTH OF FINDS

The lack of sixth-century archaeological evidence is explained in two contrasting ways.

1. The region was only sparsely settled; therefore, the population left only scant remains. This approach was adopted in the past by almost all scholars (e.g., Albright 1960b; Kenyon 1965), and is still followed today by most of them.³¹ The dearth of evidence, therefore, was a result of the low demography and scarcity of settlements which were typical of this era.
2. The period did not have a distinct material culture that differed from the previous period (Barkay 1992; 1993). The material culture of the period should be viewed as a continuation of the late-seventh and early-sixth centuries B.C.E., and also as a predecessor of the Persian period, without any specific major characteristics for this era, which lasted about fifty years. This approach views the Babylonian period’s material culture as a continuation of the Iron Age (see now Lipschits 1997b; 1998b; 2003b; 2005; Barstad 1996; 2003). This view allows for many sites to exist during the sixth century. Many supporters of this outlook

31. E.g., Stern 1997a; 1998; 2000b; 2001; Mazar 1990; Stager 1996; King and Stager 2001, 251–58; see also Vanderhoof 2003a; Oded 2001; Liverani 2005, 194–96, 231–34; Finkelstein 2010, 46.

(the continuity theory) regard the sixth century as more populated than supporters of the first school, since in their view sites that were usually dated to the Iron Age should be reassigned to the sixth century. Since many of the major sites were already excavated, and sixth century B.C.E. destruction layers were unearthed, supporters of the continuity theory suggest that the rural sector was not affected by the war and that many of the small Iron Age sites discovered in the surveys were representative of the sixth century B.C.E.

Both explanations could account for the lack of detailed and specific knowledge of sixth-century B.C.E. material culture. For this reason, the debate continues concerning the demographic reality in Judah during this period: “empty” or not (a way to circumvent this problem will be discussed in chapter 2, and another solution will be offered in ch. 3).

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

In chapter 1, “The End of the Iron Age in Judah: Primary Archaeological Data,” I discuss the data from the central sites in Judah and its vicinity. The data mainly include tells, which were usually destroyed in the early-sixth or late-seventh century B.C.E. The widespread destruction of these sites gave rise to the traditional view that Judah was desolate in the sixth century B.C.E. Due to the persuasiveness of the evidence, followers of both schools of thought accept that the urban sector was destroyed, and supporters of the continuity school attribute continuity to the rural sector only. The aim of the chapter 1 is, therefore, to present the basic settlement data regarding the end of the Iron Age of Judah in order to establish common grounds for discussion.

Due to the continuity school’s view that life in the rural sector continued as usual, chapter 2 “Judah in the Sixth Century B.C.E.: A Rural Perspective,” examines the reality of settlement in the rural sector. Since no sites can be identified as belonging to this period on the basis of ceramic *fossiles directeurs*, in this chapter I suggest a method to enable us to identify sites that were settled at the time. The method involves examining patterns of continuity and discontinuity in excavated small sites from the Iron Age to the Persian period, since continuities in such sites (unlike in central mound) might indicate settlement also in the intervening sixth century B.C.E. The method has already been published (Faust 2003b; Faust and Safrai 2005), but the chapter is updated, includes many more sites, and refers to additional issues (see Lipschits 2004; Faust and Safrai 2005).

In chapter 3, “Greek Imports and the Neo-Babylonian Period,” I discuss the sixth century from a different perspective. While the local pottery cannot

be securely dated to the period under discussion, Greek pottery can be dated to the sixth century with great precision. A close examination of the find spots of this pottery, both in the region and abroad, can shed new light both on the reality on the ground and on dating local pottery. While the dating of Greek pottery can also be debated, both schools of thought regarding sixth century B.C.E. Judah follow the traditional chronology of Greek pottery. When compared with the situation in other parts of the Mediterranean, and especially in the Phoenician colonies in the west, the findings in Judah and the surrounding regions are indicative not only of the prosperity or devastation of the region, but also of the Babylonian policy and economic interests in the region.

Chapter 4, “Social and Cultural Changes in Judah: The Iron Age to the Persian Period,” examines the social and cultural processes in Judah during the transition from the Iron Age to the Persian period. Identifying socio-cultural changes allows us to understand the nature of this transition. Some of the data (from burial practices and domestic architecture) have already been published (Faust 2004b). However, the discussion here is updated, expanded, and includes aspects of religion, language, and kinship.

Chapter 5, “Settlement and Demography in Judah: Seventh to Second Centuries B.C.E.,” takes a broader perspective in examining settlement fluctuations and demographic trends during the settlement peak of the late Iron Age in Judah (seventh century B.C.E.), the Persian period, the Neo-Babylonian period, and the Hellenistic period.³² Understanding the nature of these long-term processes (and their causes) affords a deeper understanding of the settlement reality and demographic situation in Judea during the Neo-Babylonian period. The chapter also presents a new perspective on the demographic reality in Persian-period Judah, and also in the Neo-Assyrian provinces in the late Iron Age.

Chapter 6, “The Babylonian Destruction in Context: Nebuchadnezzar and Sennacherib Compared,” in which I discuss the results of the Babylonian campaigns of the late-seventh and early-sixth centuries from a comparative perspective. The chapter will compare the archaeological results of Nebuchadnezzar’s and Sennacherib’s campaigns (study of the latter is based on Faust 2008b), which will provide a way to assess the degree of the Babylonian destruction within what can be viewed as its ancient Near Eastern context.

In chapter 7, “Sixth-Century Judah as a Post-Collapse Society,” I analyze the implications of the previous chapters to create a deeper understanding of sixth-century Judah. This analysis will be studied in light of data from other societies

32. Much of this chapter is based on Faust (2007c).

that went through processes of collapse and post-collapse (esp. in light of the seminal works of Tainter 1988; 1999; see also Faust 2004b; 2007c).

Chapter 8, “Consequences of Destruction: The Continuity Theory Revisited,” examines additional aspects of the reality in the sixth century B.C.E. and evaluates the main arguments of the continuity school: was Judah part of a Babylonian imperial economy; was a drastic demographic decline possible, and under what circumstances can such changes occur? I also explain how the entire debate, as far as the archaeological interpretation is concerned, was erroneously conceived.

Chapter 9, “The Land of Benjamin Revisited,” looks at settlement in the region of Benjamin. The area has received a great deal of scholarly attention because of the consensus among scholars that settlements existed in the Neo-Babylonian period. Can the old excavations and/or new interpretations stand scrutiny, or are the conclusions and interpretations based on the biblical texts?

Chapter 10, “Life in Judah in the Sixth Century B.C.E.,” will attempt to reconstruct life in Judea during the sixth century. The chapter will try to assess where people lived, the economy, and the type of life that existed in the region at the time.

Chapter 11, “Judah in the Sixth Century B.C.E.: Summary and Conclusions,” concludes the volume. Here I also comment on aspects of the debate not dealt with in previous chapters.

