In spite of clear continuities between neo-Babylonian and neo-Assyrian rule and rule by the Achaemenids, it is too simplistic to assume that the Persians simply inherited these regions in a smooth transfer from rule by one empire to rule by another. Yehud in particular appears to have undergone considerable disruption in the neo-Babylonian period, and I have already demonstrated the difficulty of reconstructing this period in Yehud with any certainty, although it is clear that the land did not lie empty, that industry continued with Mizpah serving as a centre, and that new local elites families emerged as well as new ruling families from Ammon and families of Arab descent. If we cannot say with certainty that under the Persians administrative policies in Yehud continued to be based on those of the neo-Assyrians and neo-Babylonians (evidence about such policies is admittedly limited), it is likely that in other regions, the Persians built upon and adapted what was already there, indeed there was probably no alternative to such an approach. One thing is certain, the primary goal of all of these empires was conquest and the collection of tribute which followed, and as discussed in the previous chapter, even the Persians, who often presented themselves as bringers of peace and restorers of order, emphasized the centrality of conquest and domination in the inscriptions of their kings.

In the initial stages of Persian organisation of the empire, it would appear that Babylonia and Transeuphratene were controlled by the same satrap who held the title “governor of Babylon and Transeuphratene.” When the two

---

1 See below chapter five.
2 Parpola demonstrates how the Assyrian empire left some lasting influences (Parpola, “Assyria’s Expansion,” 99–111). Stern also argues for the continuity of administrative structures from the neo-Assyrian to Persian periods (Stern, “The Dor Province in the Persian Period in the Light of Recent Excavations at Dor,” 147–55).
3 J. Elayi and J. Sapin, Beyond the River: New Perspectives on Transeuphratene. (JSOTS 250, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 16. One named as holding this office was Gobryas (Gūbaru), another Hystanes (Ushtānu) who was in office until 516 BCE or later. A lack of certainty surrounds the question of the splitting of Babylonia and Transeuphratene. A document dated to the end of the reign of Darius (and thus, later than Tattenai), refers to Huta “governor of Babylonia and Transeuphratene.” Were the two regions joined again or was there a chief satrap over both while each had an individual satrap who was subordinate to him? (For discussion see Elayi and Sapin, Beyond the River, 17).
split is not known, but a Persian document dated to the early fifth century BCE, mentions Tattanu, whom Elayi and Sapin assume to be the Tattenai of Ezra (Ezra 5:3; 6:6, 13). In the Persian document Tattenai is given the title “Satrap of the Province Beyond the River.” For most of the Persian period, Transeuphratene comprised the largest territorial and administrative district of the Achaemenid Empire. The question of the precise boundaries of Transeuphratene has occupied scholars as much as the question of the boundaries of Yehud in the Persian period. In my view, however, neither of these questions can be answered with any precision. First, in the ancient world, boundaries or political frontiers were not equivalent to our modern notions of boundaries. Secondly, boundaries tended to shift as political and environmental circumstances changed. The southern frontier of the Persian Empire for example, is particularly difficult to be precise about, since we do not know the area of Arab control and remain uncertain about Arab/Persian relations which seem to have fluctuated regularly. Such shifting of boundaries may have been at times minimal, but other times radical changes occurred, such as Cambyses’ extension of the empire to include Egypt. Although our sources do not permit us to discuss Transeuphratene’s economy, its administration and even its boundaries with any precision, we can get some sense of the larger region of which the Yehud of Nehemiah’s time was just a small part.

In his Histories (I 11. 89) Herodotus tells us that there were twenty governors in the Persian Empire, all of whom called themselves satraps. It is uncertain, however, whether Herodotus is accurate, and Brosius thinks that the districts referred to by Herodotus are not satrapies but are simply administrative districts. Satraps were usually of Persian origin and were members of the nobility. Xenophon understands the duties of the Satrap to have been “…to

---

4 Elayi and Sapin, op. cit., 16.
5 Elayi and Sapin, op. cit., 17.
7 Elayi and Sapin, Beyond the River, 16. Herodotus, Histories III 1. 7, 88 reports mutual cooperation and respect while later there is evidence that the Arab tribes went over to the side of the Egyptians in their efforts to expel Persia; for discussion see M.A. Dandamev, A Political History of the Achaemenid Empire (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 296.
8 Brosius, The Persian Empire from Cyrus II to Artaxerxes I, 73–75. Although I will refer to Herodotus as a source of information for the Achaemenids, I am mindful of the debate about the reliability of Herodotus as a source. Cawkwell, for example, claims that Herodotus has no real understanding of Persian history or the geography of the vast empire, and he refers to