On August 9th, 449 BCE, an Elephantine scribe named Nathan son of Ananiah drafted a marriage contract for a well-known member of the same community, Ananiah son of Azariah, and a slave named Tamet (TAD B3.3). This entirely preserved contract, like the other extant Elephantine marriage documents, is an agreement between the bridegroom and the head of the bride’s family, in this case her master, Meshullam son of Zaccur. It includes a detailed list of the dowry, provisions regulating the dissolution of marriage, succession, and rights to the woman’s child in case of her death. The contract is concluded by the name of the scribe and the names of three witnesses, respectively: Nathan son of Gaddul, Menahem son of Zaccur, and Gemariah son of Mahseiah. Of these, Menahem, most likely Meshullam’s brother, figures as third witness in an earlier marriage contract dated 458 or 445 BCE (TAD B2.6) drafted by the same scribe, Nathan son of Ananiah. The first witness, Nathan son of Gaddul, is found in this document only. He is the brother of Dalah, Menahem, and Islah, all known from other Elephantine contracts, where they are witnesses. The last witness to our 449 BCE marriage contract, Gemariah son of Mahseiah, figures in three more contracts: in a deed of gift from 460 or 459 BCE (TAD B2.3:29), in a contemporary grant of usufruct (TAD B2.4:18), and in another deed of gift from 434 BCE (TAD B3.5:23). This last contract was drafted by another scribe, Mauziah son of Nathan, the son of the aforementioned Nathan, the earliest known member of a four-generations scribal family, whose five members—Ananiah, Nathan, Mauziah and his brother Ahio and, later, Mauziah’s son Ahio—were active between 460 and 400 BCE. Their activity consisted, in the first place, in drawing up legal documents and letters. In addition, they

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figure as witnesses to contracts written by other scribes, as is the case of Nathan son of Ananiah, listed in two different contracts from 460 or 459 BCE (TAD B2.3:32 and B2.4:20). The family ties between witnesses and scribes provide a complex framework of relations among members of the Elephantine community. The study of witnesses, the connections evidenced by recurring names of witnesses, scribes and parties, and the possibility that these individuals had different roles in the contracts, offer a further level of analysis of the Elephantine legal documents.

About forty years ago Bezalel Porten published a monograph (Archives from Elephantine. The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony) devoted to what turned out to be his lifetime scholarly endeavor, the study of Egyptian Aramaic documents. Today we rely on his four-volume re-edition of the entire corpus that he published, together with the paleographer Ada Yardeni, from 1986 to 1999. It is therefore a great honor and a pleasure to offer to Professor Porten this reflection on witnesses in Egyptian Aramaic documents, in comparison to witnesses in contemporary cuneiform contracts from Achaemenid Babylonia, belonging to the archive of the descendants of Murašû. This comparison is conducted in the light of the common threads that tie together the legal traditions which lay behind the cuneiform and the Aramaic contracts.

The Murašû archive is a private archive of more than 800 cuneiform contracts on clay tablets from Nippur, which records the activity of a private bank during the 5th century BCE, especially with regard to agricultural management. Again, forty years ago, Yochanan Muffs traced the connection of Aramaic legal practice—as illustrated by formulae found in the Egyptian Aramaic contracts from Elephantine—to the Mesopotamian legal tradition. The centrality of Egyptian Aramaic documents for the study of the Aramaic legal tradition is unquestion-