The prophet Ezekiel, who dwelt “among the captives by the river of Chebar”, knew that the exiles from Israel and Judah were scattered and dispersed among several peoples and countries, hence the repeated phrases in his prophecies about the “sons of Israel” who are scattered among the heathen and dispersed through the countries (e.g., 20, 23, 34; 22, 15; 28, 25; 34, 6; 36, 19). Other prophets of that time also refer to the dispersion of the deportees among “all the nations” and “all the places”, in the context of explaining the captivity as divine punishment or in the prophecies of redemption and deliverance (e.g., Isa 11, 11; 43, 5–6; 60, 4, 9; 66, 20; Jer 29, 14; 30, 11; Zech 2, 1–4, 10–11; 8, 7). This matches the verse in the book of Esther, “There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom” (3, 8). Obadiah, who lived few years after the destruction of the first Temple, speaks about the “captivity of Jerusalem which is in Sepharad”, which is probably Saparda/Sards in Lydia (western Anatolia, and cf. Isa 11, 11). The verse in Jer 3, 14, “and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family”, reflects a situation in which the exiles dwelt in various places as families and communities. The Edict of Cyrus mentions “all the places” where the exiles dwelt. Judeans/Israelites lived in nearly 30 settlements in Babylonia according to the Murashu archive (5th century BCE), and it is plausible that Judean/Israelite deportees or their descendants had lived in some of these places already from the Assyrian and/or Chaldean periods. Note that the presence of the Israelites/Judeans in the diaspora was not the consequence of migration but of deportation by the Assyrian and Chaldean empires. Hence, they were scattered in many places according to imperial interests. Yet an exile could move from place to place if the need arose and if he was free to do so.

The policy of the above empires was to settle deportees from
various nations not only in urban centers such as Ashur, Calah, Nineveh, Nippur, and Babylon but also in the rural periphery and even in deserted, uncultivated areas and ruined settlements. This policy aimed at enlarging the cultivated arable lands, restoring ruined places, and building new ones. Obviously then, the exiles from Israel and Judah were settled in urban centers and rural areas along the valleys of the Tigris and the Euphrates, and of their tributaries.

2 Kgs 17,6 (cf. 18,11; 2 Chron 5,26) states that the king of Assyria “took Samaria and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and the Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes”. Verse 23 of the same chapter says “So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day”. “Assyria” in this context means the territories under direct Assyrian control (provinces), including Assyria proper.

Ashur

The city of Ashur was the old capital of Assyria and was called after the national god Ashur. Among the many non-Assyrian/Akkadian names from people who lived in Ashur one can certainly discern two Israelite/Judean names (a) Sa-*<al?>*-ti-ia-u, mentioned in a document of Ashur from 631 BCE and bearing the title šaknu, and (b) Ba-na-ia-ú (VAT 8653), who was witness to a legal transaction in 636 BCE. In a legal document from 700 BCE (ADD 176+ = SAA VI, 61) there is a reference to Ahi-ia-u (חֵין), the father of Manuki-Ashur.

Calah/Nimrud

This was the capital of Assyria (till 707 BCE). Ashurnasirpal II brought to the city people from several countries. An Aramean ostraca from Nimrud contains a list of West-Semitic names such as Hananel,

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4 Oded, Mass Deportations, p. 60.