

Israeli Exhibit Confirms Ancient Judean Presence in Babylonia



Visitors at Bible Lands Museum Exhibit on Ancient Judean
Cuneiform Tablets in Baylonia

Source: *Israeli Hayom and Reuters*

This *Israel Hayom* [article](#) on a Bible Lands Musueum exhibit in Israel of cuneiform tablets reveals the history of ancient Judean population who went to ancient Babylonia, became successful business men and traders. Theremnant who remained in Babylonia gave birth to the torah and later the talmud. Those Babylonian Jews who returned to Jerusalem brought with them the early texts of the torah and rebuilt the second Temple. Those Jews who remained were exiled in 1950 significantly bolstering the population and accomplishments of the new State of Israel. Dr. Harold Rhode, as a result of a discovery during the Iraq War in 2003, was able to have the later heritage of the Babylonian Jews recovered, restored by the US National Archives and Records Administration and displayed in exhibits in the US during 2013-2014. See our December 2013 *New English Review* interview – [The Savior of Iraqi Jewish Heritage: an interview with Dr. Harold Rhode](#).

[Watch](#) this Israel Hayom video on the Judean Babylonian Cuneiform Exhibit:

Israel Hayom: Exhibition reveals life of Judeans exiled in ancient Babylon

Bible Lands Museum exhibit based on over 100 small clay cuneiform tablets that relate quotidian transactions between Jews in the Babylonian exile some 2,500 years ago • Expert says Nebuchadnezzar needed the Judeans to revive the Babylonian economy.

A new exhibition of ancient clay tablets discovered in modern-day Iraq is shedding light for the first time on the daily life of Jews exiled to Babylon some 2,500 years ago.

The exhibition is based on more than 100 cuneiform tablets, each no bigger than an adult's palm, that detail transactions and contracts between Judeans driven from, or convinced to move from, Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar around 600 BCE.

Archaeologists got their first chance to see the tablets – acquired by a wealthy London-based Israeli collector – barely two years ago. They were blown away.

“It was like hitting the jackpot,” said Filip Vukosavovic, an expert in ancient Babylonia, Sumeria and Assyria who curated the exhibition at Jerusalem's Bible Lands Museum.

“We started reading the tablets and within minutes we were absolutely stunned. It fills in a critical gap in understanding of what was going on in the life of Judeans in Babylonia more than 2,500 years ago.”

Nebuchadnezzar, a powerful ruler famed for the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, came to Jerusalem several times as he sought to spread the reach of his kingdom.

Each time he came – and one visit coincided with the destruction of Jerusalem's First Temple in 586 BCE – he either forced or encouraged the exile of thousands of Judeans.

One exile in 587 BCE saw around 1,500 people make the perilous journey via modern-day Lebanon and Syria to the fertile crescent of southern Iraq, where the Judeans traded, ran businesses and helped the administration of the kingdom.

"They were free to go about their lives, they weren't slaves," Vukosavovic said. "Nebuchadnezzar wasn't a brutal ruler in that respect. He knew he needed the Judeans to help revive the struggling Babylonian economy."

The tablets, each inscribed in minute Akkadian script, detail trade in fruits and other commodities, taxes paid, debts owed and credits accumulated.

The exhibition details one Judean family over four generations, starting with the father, Samak-Yama, his son, grandson and his grandson's five children, all with biblical Hebrew names, many of which are in use today.

"We even know the details of the inheritance made to the five great-grandchildren," said Vukosavovic. "On the one hand it's boring details, but on the other you learn so

much about who these exiled people were and how they lived.”

Vukosavovic describes the tablets as completing a 2,500-year puzzle. While many Judeans returned to Jerusalem when the Babylonians allowed it after 539 BCE, many others stayed and built up a vibrant Jewish community that lasted two millennia.

“The descendants of those Jews only returned to Israel in the 1950s,” he said, referring to a time when many in the Diaspora moved from Iraq, Persia, Yemen and North Africa to the newly established state of Israel.