

Ghost archival patterns and Yahwistic names*

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[In his 1978 study, Elias J. Bickerman attributed the higher percentage of Yahwistic names of Judean sons in the Murašû archive than their fathers to a revival of national Yahwistic sentiments among the Judean communities. However, this theory became unattainable once the same pattern was observed in the Al-Yahudu texts. A consistent intergenerational discrepancy cannot be explained by any cultural, historical, or socio-economic diachronic phenomenon; therefore, it is a ghost pattern. This paper presents a different approach, according to which the higher percentage of Yahwistic names among Judean protagonists compared to their patronyms results from two phenomena: a “first-born bias” regarding the protagonists in first millennium cuneiform archives and a tendency within the Judean communities to name their firstborn with a Yahwistic name.]

Keywords: Yahwistic names, cuneiform archives, archival bias, Judean exiles, household.

0. Introduction

The onomasticon of Judean exiles in Babylonia during the sixth and fifth centuries BCE presents us a peculiar pattern; namely, a *consistent* intergenerational discrepancy in Yahwistic names. As identified by Alstola (2020: 270), this peculiarity cannot be explained by any known socio-historical process, and we must therefore turn our focus to the archives and the way their formation may create ghost patterns. In the following I first present the pattern, previous attempts at contextualisation, and the problems arisen with the publication of new sources. I will then suggest a new approach and discuss a possible solution to the problem.

1. The pattern

In his 1978 study, Elias J. Bickerman examined the naming patterns of Judean exiles as reflected in cuneiform sources. At that time, there was only one substantial source for Judean onomasticon available, namely the archive of the Murašû family from Nippur. The archive covers the second half of the fifth century BCE, 455–404 (10 Art I–1 Art II), though most of the tablets come from about the mid-period, ca. 439–417 BCE (20 Art I–7 Dar II), which roughly corresponds to one generation.¹ Given that most individuals are presented in cuneiform sources along with the

* Abbreviations follow those of *AHw* and *CAD*, except for those in the bibliographical list: *BaAr*= Babylonische Archive; *CUSAS*= Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology; *GMTR*= Guides to the Mesopotamian Textual Record; *JANEH*= Journal of Ancient Near East History; *NBER*= National Bureau of Economic Research.

1. See Jursa 2005: 113–114. For a convenient and recent discussion of the Murašû archive, especially in the context of Judeans in Babylonia, see Alstola 2020: 164–169, and more detailed discussions in the following sections.

name of their father, i.e., “A son of B” (Akk. *A māršu ša B*), Bickerman sought to compare the names of the Judean sons and their fathers in the archive.

In short, he noticed that the percentage of Yahwistic names was higher within the younger generation of Judeans in the Murašû archive than among their fathers.² Bickerman suggested that the inter-generational upsurge in Yahwistic names was due to a “YHWH-alone” movement among Judean exiles in Babylonia. This, according to Bickerman, meant a return to an exclusive worship of YHWH and a complete rejection of local deities, as was demanded from the exiles by prophets such as Ezekiel and Second Isaiah (Bickerman 1978: 23). Given the chronological horizon of the Murašû archive (the second half of the fifth century BCE), he argued that the origin of this phenomenon took hold around 480 BCE and can be seen as the context of the later activity of Ezra and Nehemiah in Jerusalem, ca. 460–440 BCE (Bickerman 1978: 23–25).

Since then, however, the publication of the so-called Al-Yahudu (henceforth AY) tablets from the village of Yaḥūd and its environs has doubled the known Judean onomasticon (see Table 1 below), as well as considerably widen the chronological coverage, now stretching back to the first generation of Judean exiles.³ In his recent comprehensive treatment of the Judean exiles, Tero Alstola (2020) was thus able to examine a much larger corpus than Bickerman, covering most of the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. Surprisingly, Alstola finds that the same Yahwistic naming pattern persists throughout the sources. That is, there is a greater percentage of Yahwistic names among protagonists compared to their fathers.⁴ Despite the fact that the two text groups cover together more than 170 years (with a gap of about 30 years; AY: 572–477, Murašû: 454–404), both the Murašû and AY texts present us with the same persistent phenomenon throughout multiple generations. Furthermore, Alstola stresses that the same pattern appears even when the AY texts are assigned to three chronological subphases: 33 Nbk–17 Nbn, 1 Cyr–16 Dar, and 17 Dar–9 Xer. The number of bearers of Yahwistic names *always* exceeds the number from the generation that preceded them, no matter what generation we look at. Alstola’s findings are summarised in the following table:

	Protagonists	Patronymics	Gap
Murašû archive	66% (40/60)	46% (19/41)	20
AY: general	82% (124/151)	66% (73/110)	16
AY: 33 Nbk–17 Nbn	86%	53%	33
AY: 1 Cyr–16 Dar	81% (89/110)	70% (54/77)	11
AY: 17 Dar–9 Xer	89%	69%	20

Table 1: Judean naming practices: based on Alstola 2020: 268 (fn. 1302) and 269 (table 4)

2. The methodological problem of name-based ethnic identification is well known. Since Yahwistic names, however, are generally speaking confined to Judeans, the use of a Yahwistic theophoric element is a solid indication that the individual is of Judean descent. Family members of such individuals can be considered Judean as well. From our modern perspective, this creates a bias in favor of Yahwistic names, though it is important to stress that our bias is kept even regardless to the archival context.

3. Pearce and Wunsch 2014, Wunsch 2022. The numbers used in the present study are based on those assembled in Alstola 2020. Small discrepancies, if any, with the final publication of Wunsch 2022 are minor. Also not included are few Judeans attested in the tablets published in Fadhil Al-Bayati 2022; e.g., Nīr-Yāḥu in No. 26: 13.

4. His findings are summarized in Alstola 2020: 269, and see Table 1 below. While the gap between protagonists and their fathers is admittedly greater in the Murašû archive than in the AY texts, the pattern is clearly maintained throughout.

The persistence of the pattern throughout the sources, regardless of chronological subdivisions, deflates Bickerman's argument for a revived *YHWH-alone* movement since this would necessitate the pattern to be confined to a single chronological context. Alstola, who identifying that the new AY sources indeed invalidate Bickerman's suggestion, states, "*it must be concluded that the available data on naming practices is somehow skewed, ... (t)he reason for this corruption remains unclear, and, for now, one must refrain from drawing any conclusions from this generational pattern*" (Alstola 2020: 270).

Both Bickerman and Alstola examine the problem from a chronological perspective, with a focus on social aspects; as do others, e.g., Bloch 2014. The question, as it has been asked so far, is: What changed between point A (in time) and point B within the social group of Judean exiles to impact a shift in the group's onomasticon? Yet, if the differences between protagonists and their fathers cannot be explained by cultural or historical developments, the solution must lie elsewhere. An alternative approach to the problem would be from an archival perspective.

2. *In search for a new approach*

The meaning of using an archival perspective in the present context would be to look for biases in the sources that might explain an observable (naming) pattern. Many such biases are relatively easy to spot and are widely acknowledged: for example, the overrepresentation of men versus women or native Babylonians versus West Semites, Elamites, etc. In these cases, however, the bias applies equally to both the names of protagonists and their corresponding patronyms alike. The bias we are looking for should, therefore, have a greater or lesser effect with regard to the onomasticon of either protagonists or their fathers, explaining the discrepancy among Yahwistic names.

Before discussing such a bias, however, it is important to clarify a small but crucial point regarding terminology. Bickerman thought of A and B in the formula "A son of B" as independently representing two separate generations. That is, each individual who is presented in the text along with his patronym can be mined for information regarding two successive generations, the comparison of which would yield a meaningful multi-generational pattern. Alstola, while being more careful in his phrasing, generally follows Bickerman's framing of the question; see Alstola 2020: 268.

Bickerman's "sons" are, in fact, the protagonists in the texts. It is their identity, status, and life story that brought them to be mentioned in the text. Protagonists are required to play a certain role in the recorded activity. They often act as representatives of their community, household, or administrative unit. This holds true not only for the main (active) protagonists but for (passive) witnesses as well.⁵ "Fathers," on the other hand, are attested only by proxy. Their own status, position, or identity is of no direct importance. Thus, those sons and fathers should be discussed as protagonists and patronyms, respectively. Each plays its own distinct part in the text.⁶ The bias we are looking for should, then, have a different effect on protagonists in comparison to patronyms.

5. While some witnesses were chosen (somewhat arbitrarily) due to availability, the presence of most witnesses can be explained by their status/function and relation to the case; see von Dassow 1999: 6.

6. In light of this, it is almost needless to point out that for a proper generational comparison, protagonists from two distinct timeframes should be examined.

3. Hypothesis: the first-born bias

Within the Neo-Babylonian household, both in the narrow sense of the nuclear family as well as in the wider Babylonian institute of patrimonial household (*bīt abi*), a special place was reserved for the first-born. I believe that what I call here the “first-born bias” is the first step towards a solution for our persistent naming pattern. In short, I argue that the privileges enjoyed by first-born sons in first millennium Babylonia (and the Ancient Near East in general, for that matter) are reflected in their overrepresentation in the cuneiform archival record.⁷

Probably of most importance is the favored position of the first-born vis-à-vis their younger siblings in inheritance laws. First-born sons inherited more land, property, prebends, and luxury/prestige goods than their younger siblings.⁸ All of these are “record-generating possessions”, which would leave their mark in cuneiform records. Additionally, first-born sons also headed their household upon the death of their father and would therefore be recorded, for example, in marriage-related cases of their female relatives. In the wider context of the Babylonian *bīt abi* (patrimonial household, lit. “house of the father”), the first-born son of the eldest brother held an authoritative status and was responsible, inter alia, for taking care of the property of extinct family lines.⁹ This too is a record-generating position, which was only in the hands of first-borns. The last aspect concerns the public sphere, within which, it can be argued that first-borns were more likely to hold higher positions in local and state institutions. Admittedly, to the best of my knowledge, we have no clear textual support for this assumption. Yet the well-established fact that certain offices were often kept within confined social circles means that households (both in the narrow and the wide sense) play a part in one’s career in the public sphere. Hence, the first-born’s prominent position within a household mentioned above would play its part in this regard as well, and they were more likely to hold a more central position in their community in general.

3.1. The fade-away effect

The final key aspect of the first-born bias concerns what may be referred to as a fade-away or diluting effect. Is there a reason that, unlike the male versus female or native versus newcomer biases mentioned above, the first-born bias would manifest differently among protagonists and patronyms? I would argue, yes!

As noted, protagonists and their fathers are not of equal standing in the documents. Protagonists are, by definition, the focal point of a text, and it is their identity, status, and life story that are the greatest influencing factors of their attestation in a given document; it is their financial difficulties, business initiatives, official capacity, etc., which have brought them to be mentioned. And it is for the same reason that their father is mentioned alongside them too. Attesting as a patronym in a document has little to no connection to the actual identity, status, and life story of the father. One may argue that the sons of first-borns will have a slightly better starting point than their cousins. While this might be true to some (minor) extent, it would be greatly diluted over time,

7. It is important to stress that this pertains to cuneiform archives in general, not specifically to the AY and Murašû tablets.

8. While a double share in the inheritance for the elder son can be taken as a rule of thumb, reality was unsurprisingly slightly more complex, especially as the number of brothers increased, as well as in regard to undividable assets. For an updated study of Babylonian inheritance laws in first millennium Babylonia, see Wunsch 2020: 460–464 on the division of inheritance between multiple siblings.

9. Waerzeggers 2010: 90 and see pp. 81–90 for further discussion on the *bīt abi* within the priestly families of Borsippa.

making it a practically insignificant factor in the written records. Additionally, some of the specific aspects of the first-borns, such as heading their household upon the death of their father, would no longer be relevant. With time, each of the brothers will eventually develop and head their own household.

Up until now, I have discussed the rationale behind the hypothesized first-born bias. The next step would be to test it. This, unfortunately, is not as simple a task as it might seem at first. Despite the wealth of archival sources at our disposal, even the richest of the first millennium Babylonian archives are mostly insufficient for a high-resolution analysis. Below is a preliminary attempt at testing this hypothesis.

4. *Testing the first-born bias hypothesis*

Before delving into the specific problem at hand, a few words are in order regarding the archival sources. It is generally agreed that what scholars today call “archive X” or “dossier Y” is mostly but a small fraction of the original textual output of X and Y. This makes it extremely difficult to contextualize peculiar patterns such as the one discussed here. Frameworks such as “dead” and “live” archives are of great heuristic help in this respect, yet the level of representativeness of our sources is generally a question that is out of our reach.¹⁰ Furthermore, although the nature of clay as a writing medium means that cuneiform records provide extremely generous amounts of data to Assyriologists, rarely do we have statistically meaningful absolute numbers in confined contexts. For first millennium Babylonia, one may mention the tenths of thousands of tablets from the major temple archives of Ebabbar and Eanna, or the great business archives of the Egibi and Murašû families (ca. 1700 and 750 tablets respectively) as potential exceptions. Still, when broken down chronologically, the absolute numbers of tablets per day, month, and even year seldom allow for a meaningful statistical analysis for either private or institutional archives.

Although I would argue that the first-born bias was probably maintained in both contexts, private archives are probably better suited to test the hypothesis. The main (though not the sole) reason is that private archives tend to be chronologically and contextually more confined than, e.g., temple archives. This should allow for a more solid and controllable data set to be examined. Furthermore, in order to eliminate the built-in bias towards the archive holder himself, we must only examine *secondary* protagonists in a given archive.¹¹ That is, since archive holders and their immediate family members are attested in far greater numbers than secondary protagonists, the specific identity of an archive holder, first-born or not, will overshadow all other attested individuals. Lastly, we are not only looking for attestations of siblings within a single archival

10. A “live archive” is one which was abruptly sealed in antiquity (usually as a result of a traumatic episode) and thus, assuming proper recovery, maintained its structure. A “dead archive” on the other hand, consists of intentionally discarded records, usually of more ephemeral nature, and thus generally represents documents of expired significance. For a short description of “dead” and “live” archives, see Jursa 2005: 58–59.

11. By secondary protagonists I refer to individuals who were not the archive holder(s) or their immediate kin. Since archives often crossed through multiple generations, there is often more than one main protagonist. Thus, for example, in the Murašû archive we can identify three main protagonists: Enlil-šumu-iddin/Murašû, his nephew Rēmūt-Ninurta, and lastly Enlil-supê-muḫur, a former agent (*paqdu*, *ardu*) of the Murašû family.

context; clearly, we must also be able to identify the older and younger among them.¹² These methodological restrictions substantially shrink the potential corpus and usable data.

4.1. *A test case: Murašû archive*

The only dataset available to me that would be a suitable test case comes from the Murašû archive.¹³ In a previous (unrelated) paper (Wagner et al., 2014), we examined the applicability and potential of a computational automatic procedure and Social Network Analysis for first millennium archival studies. The assembled sample was made up of 75 texts from the Murašû archive, in which 883 individuals are attested.¹⁴ While this is only about 10% of the Murašû archive, it is important to stress that the texts were chosen randomly, with only textual completeness serving as a qualifying factor. The goal was to get the most representative sample of personal names from a controlled corpus. This fits perfectly with the goal of the present discussion.

Of the 883 (distinct) individuals, eleven pairs of siblings and one case of five brothers were identified, for a total of twenty-seven individuals relevant to this study. Incidentally, all eleven pairs of siblings are attested together in at least one text. While this was not a criterion, it was useful for determining seniority between siblings. Row (1) in the following table presents the number of cases in which either the older (a) or younger (b) sibling is better attested. Row (2) refers to the overall number of attestations. Column (c) refers to cases in which seniority could not be determined.¹⁵

	(a) Older	(b) Younger	(c) unclear
(1) Attested more than sibling (cases)	7	4	1
(2) Total attestations	39	23	(irrelevant)

Of the twelve cases of siblings, the older brother is attested more than his younger brother(s) in seven cases (1a). In four cases, it is the younger brother who has more attestations (1b). In one case, the order of birth could not be settled (1c). If we look at the absolute number of attestations, we find thirty-nine attestations of older brothers (2a) versus only twenty-three of the younger siblings (2b). These numbers fit well with the first-born bias hypothesis. Importantly, the bias reflected in the above sample is not overwhelming. There is a tendency toward an overrepresentation of older siblings, but reverse cases are to be found as well. This highlights the importance of a large enough sample. Of course, younger siblings may certainly be better attested

12. The main way to establish order of birth is look for cases in which siblings are listed together in a single tablet. In line with the general tendency for hierarchy within list in cuneiform sources, siblings would almost exclusively be listed in old-to-young order.

13. Another potential corpus would be the archives of the Borsippean priests, which have been thoroughly studied in Waerzeggers 2010 and Still 2019. Still's monograph is of special importance in this respect since he investigates social aspects and patterns of interactions between the Borsippean elites. My own attempt at identifying (a significant number of) siblings within this corpus, however, yielded no presentable outcome. Of the 30 individuals, for example, listed by Still as having frequent interactions in the Šaddinnu//Bēliya'u archive (see Still 2019: 156, table 9), I was able to identify *only one* pair of siblings: Ina-qībi-Bēl and Nabû-gāmil (sons of Nabû-šumu-ukīn//Bēliya'u). Furthermore, the brothers are attested 15 and 14 times, respectively, in the archive, and thus neither support nor negate the hypothesis. Nonetheless, I maintain that the Borsippean archives are a promising archival context, justifying further study in the future. This will have to await better access to the data and awareness of the question at hand.

14. For the list of texts, see Wagner *et al.* 2014: 131–133 (appendix A).

15. For more detail, see appendix below.

than their older brother in any given case, but in large numbers, we expect to find more or less what the Murašû sample illustrated above.¹⁶

5. *The First-Born Bias and Yahwistic Names: Connecting the Dots*

In order to link such a first-born bias in first millennium cuneiform archives to the peculiar cross-generational Yahwistic name pattern, one more step is required. Simply put, if giving a Yahwistic name for the first-born was the norm in Judean families, then we would expect precisely the identified pattern in Judean onomastics in cuneiform sources.¹⁷

The hypothetical nature of this solution is clear. To the best of my knowledge, we have no textual source speaking to a custom of naming a Judean first-born with a Yahwistic name. Additionally, to say that the sources at our disposal concerning Judean households in first millennium Babylonia are insufficient would be a great understatement. In order to assess the validity of a prominent Yahwistic onomasticon among first-born Judeans, the sample must be significantly larger. It is further reasonable to assume, it must be admitted, that a proper, solid, and statistically reliable dataset will not be available in the foreseeable future. However, while a quantitative analysis is out of reach, there are arguments to be made concerning rationale and plausibility regarding a possible connection between naming patterns and birth order. To that end, we may turn to several relevant parallel phenomena, which support the hypothesis to various degrees on a theoretical level.

Two cases stem from first millennium Babylonia itself. First, in a 2002 paper, Heather Baker examined the distribution of theophoric elements among sixth–fifth century Babylonian families. Within the propertied families of the city of Babylon, Baker identified a pattern of correlation between the order of birth and the divine order in the Babylonian pantheon: Marduk → Nabû → Nergal; i.e., Marduk-names for first-borns, Nabû-names for the second, and Nergal-names for the third (Baker 2002: 10–11). While the scope of such a phenomenon should not be overstated, Baker’s modest sample suggests that the practice was potentially present in certain social circles.¹⁸ Naturally, just like not all Babylonian families reflected the divine triad in their private onomasticon, not all Judean families would name their first-born with a Yahwistic name (and then refrain from doing so for the younger siblings). Such phenomena may best be described as a rule of thumb.

A less direct parallel may be found within the Babylonian families living slightly later, and to the south, in Hellenistic Uruk. Julien Monerie suggests that some Babylonian families have reserved a Greek name for *one* of the (male) children, who would then be raised and expected to work in the public sphere. This, he adds, would be one of the *younger* brothers, never the eldest

16. In this respect, it is hoped and assumed that the increasing digitalisation of cuneiform archival sources and the growing availability of open access data bases will enable further examination of such questions.

17. By that I do not mean that all first-borns received Yahwistic names, nor does this mean of course that younger siblings received none.

18. Of the nine cases of siblings presented by Baker that generally fit within the pattern, only four cases present us with a “full set” of the Marduk → Nabû → Nergal sequence. These cases are included in Table 3 in Baker 2002: 10, and the textual sources are listed in Appendix 3 (pp. 18–20). Two of these cases are in fact two consecutive generations of the Egibi family: the sons of Nabû-aḥḥē-iddin/Egibi (Itti-Marduk-balātu, Iddin-Nabû, and Nergal-ētir), and the sons of his eldest, Itti-Marduk-balātu/Nabû-aḥḥē-iddin/Egibi (Marduk-nāšir-apli, Nabû-aḥḥē-bullit, and Nergal-ušēzib). The other Marduk → Nabû → Nergal siblings are the sons of Marduk-bān-zēri/Bēl-ētir (Mušēzib-Marduk, Itti-Nabû-balātu, and Nergal iddin) and the sons of Nabû-mukīn-zēri (Iddin, Nabû-uballit, and Nergal-zēr-ibni).

(Monerie 2014: 84–85, and see fn. 78). The rest would normally receive proper Babylonian names, often with Anu as a theophoric element, which would fit possible future service in the temple. While the context and reasoning behind this possible practice in Hellenistic Uruk do not parallel that of the sixth–fifth century Judean exiles, it too shows how naming patterns may relate to birth order.

Turning our attention away from Mesopotamia, we find multiple examples of relevant cases. A wide survey of Roman onomastics (700 BCE–700 CE), for example, reveals “a strong tendency for the first-born male child to be given the same name as the father” (Salway 1994: 125). Moreover, this line of inquiry is even more productive for modern societies, in many of which clear patterns have been identified, pointing to a connection between birth order and naming practices; see, e.g., Japanese and Balinese cultures (Pradhana 2020) and US immigrants (Abramitzky, Platt Boustán and Eriksson 2013). Especially interesting in this respect is the widely practiced convention in the Islamic world of naming first-born sons *Muhammad*.¹⁹ The combination of religious significance, cultural codes, and conventional wisdom behind it may be taken as a possible analogy to the place of Yahwistic names in the onomasticon of mid-first millennium Judeans.

6. A possible additional pattern in light of the Yahwistic/first-born bias hypothesis

Lastly, a first-born Yahwistic bias may also indirectly explain another minor pattern in the Judean onomasticon: the percentage of “foreign names” within the exilic onomasticon. Let us look again at the numbers collected by Alstola (2020), specifically at the percentage of Akkadian names within the corpus:

	Environs of Yāhūdu		Murašū archive	
	Patronymics	First names	Patronymics	First names
Akkadian names (out of the overall identified Judeans)	7%	5%	22%	5%

Table 2: based on Alstola 2020: 269, table 4

Within the AY group, Alstola finds a similarly low percentage for both first names of protagonists and patronyms, with a slightly higher percentage for the patronyms (7%) versus the protagonists (5%). While these numbers may be seen as counter-intuitive to the assumption that foreign influence will increase with time, and thus higher numbers of Akkadian names would be expected for the protagonists’ group, it must be noted that both the absolute numbers and the percentage gap are too low to be statistically significant.²⁰ Looking at the Murašū column(s), however, we see that the small gap actually widens. While the first names of protagonists are still at 5%, more than a fifth (22%) of the Judean patronyms in the Murašū archive bore Akkadian names. Here the patronyms number fits nicely with the assumption that the percentage of foreign names will increase with time. But why does the Murašū protagonist data not correspond?

If the first-born bias is accepted, then a high percentage of Yahwistic names given to first-borns would dilute the number of Akkadian names within this group and would result in a similar

19. See, in the context of naming practices in northern Sudan Gardner 2000: 265.

20. Furthermore, if these numbers were to be taken at face value, it would also fit to first-born bias; see below.

pattern. First, this naming practice would mean that fewer Akkadian names were given to first-borns in general, and since first-borns are better represented in the archives, the overall percentage of Akkadian names would drop. Furthermore, Yahwistic theophoric elements are the main identifier of Judeans in cuneiform archives, which in turn means that many non-Yahwistic, yet still Judean, names would not be identified as Judeans. Many Judeans who bore Akkadian names fall within this category of unidentified Judeans. And so, while the generally low percentage of Akkadian names in early generations would be more or less equally low for both protagonists and their fathers, the increase expected in the later Murašû archive would clearly be seen in the patronyms group, but still diluted within their contemporary names of protagonists.

Again, it must be stressed that the absolute numbers are relatively low and prevent us from drawing solid conclusions. Note, however, that the numbers of *non-Yahwistic theophoric* names paint a very similar picture: a minor representation within the AY texts with a slightly higher percentage in the patronyms group (2% vs. 5%), and a much more substantial gap in the later Murašû texts (5% vs. 17%).

7. Conclusions

The enduring nature of cuneiform tablets grants us access to a wide range of economic, cultural, and historical aspects of the land between the rivers. The tens of thousands of archival records from the first millennium Babylonia allow scholars to think diachronically, studying chronological and geographical patterns and processes. At the risk of oversimplification, a change in the sources generally means a change in reality. Some of the more well-known examples may be the 484 Babylonian rebellion, the trial of Gimillu at the Eanna temple, or the increasing use of Aramaic and later Greek for certain types of documents. All these events/processes left their archival marks and shaped the datasets available to us today.²¹ Onomastic patterns and trends are, for the most part, no exception.

With only the Murašû archive at his disposal, Bickerman's *YHWH-alone* theory, albeit naive in retrospect, made sense in this respect; the notion that social and religious changes would be reflected in the contemporary onomasticon is undoubtedly valid. The publication of the AY tablets, however, proved Bickerman's theory wrong. The continuous over-representation of Yahwistic names among protagonists in comparison to their fathers in the Judean exilic onomasticon defies any cultural, historical, or socio-economic diachronic explanation. It is, in this sense, a *ghost pattern*.

In the present paper, therefore, I suggest a different approach, according to which the higher percentage of Yahwistic names among Judean protagonists vis-à-vis their patronyms is the result of two phenomena. First, a general first-born bias in first millennium Babylonian archives, which is relevant for protagonists but significantly less so (if at all) for patronyms. Second, there was a tendency within the Judean communities living in the sixth and fifth centuries to name their firstborn with a Yahwistic name. Thus, among the protagonists in Judean attested in cuneiform archives, the firstborn individuals bearing Yahwistic names will be overrepresented in the records, but not among their patronyms.

21. On "end of archives" in 484 BCE, see Waerzeggers 2004/5; on Gimillu and the Eanna archive see Van Driel 1998; for influence of none cuneiform scripts on the surviving records, one may mention the disappearance of sale records during the Seleucid period, probably due to the use of Greek to record sales (Jursa 2005: 25).

Although the currently available sources and the overall state of scholarship do not yet allow for a proper evaluation of all of its components, there is some corroborated evidence supporting specific aspects of this hypothesis. These concern the findings from the controlled Murašû dataset, as well as the explanatory value of the first-born bias regarding other phenomena in the Judean onomasticon; i.e., the overall distribution of non-Judean names. This is not to say that we should expect repeatability in any given context, but I believe that the first-born bias can serve as a rule of thumb in first millennium archival studies. It is another step in our understanding of structures and rationales within these corpora. One, which, if nothing else, could prevent us from following ghost patterns and misleading answers.

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9. Appendix

The following table presents the twenty-seven individuals, eleven pairs, and one family of five brothers identified as siblings within a confined segment of the Murašû archive.²² First presented are the cases in which the older sibling is attested more than his younger brother(s) (1–7), followed by the four opposite cases (8–11). The last case is one in which seniority cannot be determined (12). The number of attestations is given in brackets, and the better-attested sibling is marked in **bold**. The rationale for establishing seniority is presented in the rightmost column. Unless stated otherwise, seniority is established based on the order of listing (mostly in the witness list).

	Older (attestations)	Younger (attestations)	Father	Notes
1	Barikkya (2)	Bēl-aḥa-iddin (1)	Rušnapātu	Attested together in BE 10, 7.
2	Bēl-šarru-ušur (4)	Aplāya (1)	Marduk-bēlšunu	In UCP 9, 3, Aplāya is presented as <i>the brother of</i> Bēl-šarru-ušur. The latter is further identified as the <i>šaknu</i> of the <i>šušānūs</i> . The identification of a man by stressing his sibling, although cannot be taken as certainty, points to the seniority of the sibling; cf. the identification of Nabû-mīti-bullit in PBS 2/1, 27: 7–8 (and seal 4) as the brother of Zabīnu (case 9).
3	Enlil-kēšir (7)	Nergal-šumu-iddin (1)	Ardi-Enlil	Attested together in UCP 9, 3.

22. As noted, the corpus includes a total of 75 texts in which 883 (*distinct*) individuals were listed; see Wagner *et al.* 2014: 131–133 (appendix A).

4	Ḥannanī (4)	Bibīya (2), Zabadyāw (3), Bana'yāw (2), Zabīnā (2)	Ṭūbiyāw	The order of the brothers is clear from several joint attestations. ²³
5	Mīnaḥḥēmu (2)	Baliyāw (1)	Zabīnā	Attested together in BE 10, 118.
6	Ninurta-Iddin, šaknu of Nippur (6)	Enlil-šumu-iddin (1)	Ninurta-erība	Attested together in BE 9, 45.
7	Ninurta-nāšir (6)	Ninurta-mutīr-gimilli (1)	Nabû-aḥḥē-iddin	Attested together in BE 9 86a.
8	Nabû-iddin (1)	Bēl-uballissu (2)	Nabû-ittannu	Attested together in BE 9, 3.
9	Zabīnu (2)	Nabû-mīti-bulliṭ (4)	Balātu	Both brothers are attested as <i>šaknu</i> of the <i>ḥatru</i> of the <i>sēpiru ša ūqi</i> . ²⁴ Seniority is established based on PBS 2/1, 34 (not included in the corpus), in which Zabīnu is the <i>šaknu</i> , while his brother Nabû-mīti-bulliṭ is presented as his deputy (<i>šanū</i>).
10	Paḏāyāw (1)	Iaḥū-natanna (4)	Iadihyāw	Attested together in BE 9, 25.
11	Šabbatāyu (2)	Mīnyamēn (6)	Bēl-aba-ušur	In BE 10, 65 we find the sequence: Šabbatāyu <i>u</i> Mīnyamēn. And so, although Mīnyamēn's seal precedes Šabbatāyu's, it seems that Šabbatāyu was older.
12	Udamā (3)	Zabdiya (1)	Raḥīm-il	Uncertain seniority: Udamā speaks in BE 9, 69 to the council of Enlil on behalf of his brother and his own sons. Although it may be argued that he represents his household, thus pointing to his seniority and strengthening the first-born bias argument, I consider this case unclear.

23. This is a good illustration of the “rule of thumb” nature of our hypothesis. The older brother, Ḥannanī, is attested the most, though the not by much. Then, Zabadyāw, “breaks” the pattern slightly, which, in these figures, is expected.

24. See Mathew W. Stolper, *Entrepreneurs and Empire. The Murašû Archive, the Murašû Firm, and Persian Rule in Babylonia*, PIHANS, vol. 54 (Leiden, 1985), 83, 93–95 for attestations and discussion.