

The Jewish Colony at Elephantine

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At the beginning of this century, scholars were suspecting data concerning Jews in Egypt mentioned in the letter of Aristeas 13, dated to about 120 B.C., and the passage in question reads "Even before this time large numbers of Jews had been in Egypt with the Persians, and in an earlier date still others had been sent to help Psammetichus in his campaign against the king of the Ethiopians."¹ A few years elapsed after the commencement of the century and the first of a large series of Aramaic papyri dating to the fifth century B.C. were discovered. The revealed evidence for a Jewish military garrison on the island of Elephantine, which apparently (by that time) was long established. This collection consists of letters, legal documents, lists of names, and three pieces of literature of non-Jewish origin.

The importance of these documents rests mainly on the fact that they are contemporary with the events related, which corresponds to the general time of Nehemiah. They contribute to our knowledge of the history, life, and language of Egypt under Persian rule as they dated from the interval between Artaxerxes I (464 B.C.) and Darius II (404 B.C.).

The papyri are written in Aramaic with a few incorporated Persian and Akkadian words and a few Hebraisms, though not very many. It is apparent that the Elephantine Jews did not know Hebrew and had been identified with the Aramaeans (due to an old recognized kinship?) to such an extent that

the same person may be referred to as both a Jew and an Aramaean. Witnesses to legal documents sign their own names, indicating a certain amount of literacy. From these names we know that besides Jews and Egyptians in the town, there lived also Aramaeans, Assyrians, Persians, and perhaps others.

The most enigmatic question has been: when did these Jews come to Elephantine and for what reasons? The only definite word in the papyri themselves states that the Jews had resided here prior to the time when Cambyses arrived in 525 B.C.² One theory is based on the letter of Aristeas. If this is Psammetichus II (594-589 B.C.) there would be further indication found in a contemporary Greek inscription from Abu Simbel which states that this King's forces were composed of Greeks, Egyptians, and other peoples termed "alloglossoi" speakers of foreign languages. That these people were Semites is further attested by a Phoenician graffiti found nearby. If the Jews had aided this king, the colony then was founded by those Jews remaining behind to protect the southern frontier. This would place the founding of the colony just before the fall of Jerusalem.

Following the same theory, this pharaoh might well have been Psammetichus I (664-609 B.C.) who had fled from Egypt during the Ethiopian conquest but was restored to his position by Assurbanipal in 663 B.C. We are also told that King Manasseh of Judah aided Assurbanipal in this campaign. Herodotus reports that at this time there was a revolt at the garrison of Elephantine, many deserting to the Ethiopians.³ If this was the case, a new garrison was needed and perhaps some of Manasseh's

¹ Kautzsche, E. *Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen des Alten Testaments*, (Berlin, 1900) 11:6. Tcherikover, V. *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, trans. S. Applebaum (Philadelphia, 1959), p. 494, fn. 4.

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² Aramaic Papyri (A.P.) 30:30.

³ II:30-31.

troops volunteered.⁴ It has been also pointed out that since the religious practices of the Jews at Elephantine did not follow Deuteronomic principles, the colony must have been founded prior to Josiah's reformation in 621 B.C. On the other hand, they may have been a group discontent with the new order and were simply religious refugees who were given employment by the Egyptian government.

The most popular suggestion is that the Jewish colony was founded by Pharaoh Apries, the Hophra of Jer. 44:30 (558-570 B.C.).⁵ This same king was the instigator of trouble and promised Judah support which never materialized when Nebucadnezzar besieged Jerusalem in 589/8 B.C. The event was the cause of much desertion and since Apries had apparently seemed friendly, those people sought refuge in Egypt, thus putting the founding of the colony as late as the fall of Jerusalem. Some would feel, however, that this hardly would have given the Jews enough time to be as assimilated as they apparently were in the time of the papyri.⁶

The Elephantine papyri inform us that the satrap of Egypt under Artaxerxes I and Darius II was Arsames. They also furnish a general format of the line of authority in Egypt during the Achaemenid period. The most important official under the satrap was the **peqidh**, a term probably used to designate an official in charge of a province. The **peqidh** in lower Egypt was Nehitur.⁷ In the three absences of the satrap, it was Nehitur who administered Egypt. Nehitur's being an Egyptian would imply that native chieftains may have been deposed by the conquerors then reinstated to official positions by their

overlords. In Egypt such posts were hereditary. Other officials were called "chiefs of the Treasury." In every phase of government the presiding official had a group of "colleagues" who either were his advisers or in some way shared responsibility. The order of authority and the number of officials necessary to administer the Empire's machine for the Persians is readily seen in A.P. 26. This is an order to repair a boat and the amount of "red-tape" involved is almost humorous because of its familiarity. The sailors chose a spokesman, who reported to their foreman (Mithradates) that the boat needed repair. Mithradates informed Arsames who sent an order to some local official named Wahprimahi to make a specific list of repairs needed. This list was then sent to the treasury officials who inspected the boat to see if it were all really necessary. When this was done, they reported to Arsames who ordered Wahprimahi to have the work done. The picture obtained is that of a top-heavy bureaucracy supported by local military garrisons and mercenary troops.

It is difficult to estimate the size of the Jewish colony at Elephantine, but apparently it was rather small and military duties were at a minimum at the time of the papyri. The community was directed by a headman named Yedoniah bin Gemariah. The decree from Darius in 419 B.C. (A.P. 30) was addressed to him and he drew up the petition to the governor of Judaea in 408 B.C. (A.P. 30). His position was recognized by the Persian government. He most probably had some affiliation with the temple and may have been head priest since letters are often addressed "to Yedoniah and his colleagues the priests." He was also responsible for receiving temple funds. There is no mention in the documents of Mosaic law, but if it were upheld, this Yedoniah would most probably have been the person to administer it.

The Elephantine Jews were confined to a particular quarter of the town, but

⁴ Kraeling, E. G., *The Brooklyn Museum Aramaic Papyri* (New Haven, 1953) p. 42, fn. 13.

⁵ Bright, J., *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia, 1959) p. 327; Albright, W. F., *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Baltimore, 1956) p. 168.

⁶ Kraeling, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

⁷ Driver, G. R., *Aramaic Documents of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford, 1954) #7.

evidently by choice only, since an Egyptian boatman also has a house in that section. Regarding the appearance of their houses, excavations show them to have been built of clay brick with some stone used occasionally for doors and window sills and stairs. Ceiling construction was barrel-vaulted which necessitated rather narrow rooms. The houses usually had two stories and in this type the entrance was in the upper one. Rooms were arranged around an open court which held a stairway leading to the second level.

The Persian monetary system was naturally used at Elephantine. Gold was not a medium of exchange, but silver currency was based on gold-weight. A silver shekel of $\frac{2}{3}$ the weight of gold (or 5.6 grams) was the most common. Subdivisions of the shekel were the *rib'at*-quarter, *hallurten* to a shekel, the *ma'ah*-one twelfth of a shekel. The *karsh* was a ten shekel weight. Some of the money was pure silver (royal) and some had a 5% alloy (light). The value of the money may be seen in that the price paid for a house, in which at least five people lived, was brought for one *karsh*, four shekels, by Ananiah, a servant in the temple.⁸

The Elephantine Jews were slave owners and Brooklyn papyrus no. 8 may be possible evidence that Jews could be enslaved to Jews. In this document Zakkur bin Meshullam gives a slave boy named Yedoniah bin Uriah bin Meheseiah for adoption. The stipulation of the contract is that the boy shall be treated as a son (probably involving inheritance rights) and never again reduced to slave status. However, another transaction shows that this same man, Zakkur bin Meshullam, gives a slave woman named Tamut to Ananiah bin Azariah, the temple servant, as a wife. Since Azariah was a property owner, we know he himself was not a slave. Tamut brings a daughter, Yehoyishman, into the marriage.

Twenty years later Zakkur bin Meshullam frees both Tamut and her daughter, but under terms of *paramone*. The fact that Tamut was an Egyptian having a daughter bearing a Jewish name may imply that the daughter was a child of her master. In this respect, the boy Yedoniah, mentioned above, may not have been Jewish, but another child of such a relationship.

Slaves were treated with a certain amount of thought for their welfare. Among the family documents of a man named Mahseiah, is one of the division of slaves after the death of their mistress. These slaves are a mother and three sons, one of whom is quite small. The two sons of their former mistress each take one of the older boys, while the mother and the baby remain common property until the child has reached a certain age.⁹ These slaves were marked with an Aramaic "yod," the smallest letter in the alphabet.

There are several marriage contracts among the papyri and the procedure followed the eastern custom of the arrangement of the marriage between the prospective bridegroom and a relative, usually the father, of the bride. An amount for the dowry was agreed upon and given to the father. Anything given above this amount was considered a present for the bride. The bride was expected to take her "own possessions," probably household goods, to her new home. It seems that when men married, they did not take their brides necessarily to their father's house, but provided a home of their own.

An unmarried woman was under her father's protection, but it seems that with marriage she gained the right to own property and go before the courts in her own right—independent of father or husband. There are, among the documents, two deeds of houses presented to women by their fathers at the time of marriage. The daughter had full power to dispose of it as she chose unless there was some further revision

⁸ Brooklyn Museum Aramaic no. 3 (see Kraeling *op. cit.*).

⁹ A.P. 28.

to the contract by the giver. A man who used his wife's money was considered a borrower and wrote a formal promise of payment (without interest).¹⁰

Divorce was the right of both men and women. If the woman sued for the divorce she paid "the money of divorce" and retained her own possessions. If her husband expelled her he was to pay a penalty, and in the case where he had another wife, the bride could consider herself wrongly treated and be released from any obligation. A typical divorce procedure seems to be the following:

he daughter of Mahseiah, whose family history is recorded in the papyri, Mibtahiah, was married four times. The first three husbands were divorced and one of these is recorded in a divorce document.¹¹ In this case the husband was an Egyptian named Pi' bin Rahi. They divided all goods and possessions and the contract protects her against further suit by an heir of Pi' with penalty of five karsh. A point of discussion in regard to this document is that Mibtahiah swears by Sati. One idea is that by marrying an Egyptian, she was expelled from the Jewish community and adopted into the Egyptian. But, probably, the oath was simply demanded by the court and has no special significance. After this divorce Mibtahiah married a fourth husband, Ashor bin Zeho.¹² Another document records the names of two sons of this marriage—Yedoniah and Hahseiah. They identify themselves as Jews and belong to the same *degel*, although their father is an Egyptian civilian.¹³ A little later Ashor is called Nathan, perhaps an example of conversion, which may be the case in several examples of men with Jewish names being sons of Egyptians.¹⁴

Regarding the law courts, we have little information as to organization, but in one instance a Jew and a Persian appeared before the Egyptian-Persian

court which was presided over by Damidate (a Persian) and "his colleagues the judges."¹⁵ The administration of justice as well as the form in which legal documents are written, evidence the fact that the Persians had been influenced by the Babylonian system. Even when both parties are Jews, they appear before the same court and an oath taken by Yahu was considered as valid as one taken by any other god.

In the papyri there is no reference to Moses and the law, the Sabbath, the Patriarchs, or any tribe. Priests were not called the sons of Aaron. Since these are for the most part legal documents, perhaps there was simply no occasion to mention these things. In Deut. 12:13-14 the Israelites are enjoined that burnt offerings should be restricted to Jerusalem. Also I Kings 19:10 would have Elijah refer to "altars" in the plural. However, at Elephantine there was a temple in the fullest sense.¹⁶ It had pillars of stone and five stone gateways built of hewn blocks. The hinges of the doors were of bronze and the roof of cedarwood. It had an altar used for meal-offering and blood sacrifice. Yet there is no evidence in the papyri that the Jews felt they were doing anything wrong. In fact, when the temple was destroyed, they appealed to the high priest in Jerusalem for help in rebuilding it although he sent no answer. Either these immigrants did not know of Josiah's promulgation or thought that after the destruction of Jerusalem it was no longer applicable.

Sanctuaries to Yahweh, however, were not uncommon after Josiah's time. In II Kings 17:32ff. Yahweh is still being worshipped in high places. In Judah, there seems to have been deterioration or perhaps a continuation in the direction of paganism. Jeremiah (19:13) speaks of the cult of the "host of heaven" and the "queen of heaven" (7:18). Ezekiel also described how certain cults, including the worship of the ris-

¹⁰ A.P. 35.

¹¹ A.P. 14.

¹² Brooklyn Museum Papyri, 15.

¹³ A.P. 20.

¹⁴ A.P. 25.

¹⁵ A.P. 6.

¹⁶ A.P. 30.

ing sun and mourning for Tammuz, were carried on at the Jerusalem temple itself.¹⁷

In a document dated to the year 400 B.C. the list of temple contributors is taken as the main evidence for syncretism. In this Yedoniah bin Gemarian collects 31 karsh and two shekels, divided thus: for Yahu—12 karsh, 6 shekels; for Eshembethel—7 karsh; and for 'Anathbethel—12 karsh. In a document, a man swears by Herembethel.¹⁸

It has been argued, on one hand, that these Jews were not practicing a depraved type of Jewish religion as that mentioned by Ezekiel, but worshipped their national God, the four other deities being his vassals. Albright would see this as a symbiosis between heretical Yahwism and a syncretistic Aramaic cult.

Seemingly there were no other foreign temples at Elephantine. There may, however, been several at Syene. Hermopolis papyri, addressed to persons at Syene, mention the divinities Nabu, Banit-in-Syene, Bethel, and Malkatshamin "the queen of heaven."¹⁹ Since these Jews had lived for a long time among peoples of various religious practices, the recognition of comparable deities may only have been practical for social acceptance. The god Yahu, however, was the chief object of worship and the head of the "pantheon" and was also thought to be present in his temple. Yahu was "the god who dwells in Yeb the fortress."²⁰

Some scholars point out that in the list of the temple contributors Yahu received 123 light shekels and that originally the list contained exactly that number of names. The gifts to other gods would represent free-will offerings and required no listing of donors.²¹ Many would take this as evidence of outright polytheism. At the same time it has been advocated that the state-

ment in Isaiah, 19:18-19, rather than being a prophesy referring to the later temple of Onias and dating the passage to the Hellenistic period, actually is to be dated much earlier and is an encouragement to Jewish immigrants to build a new temple in Egypt.²² If this is the case, it is certain that Isaiah did not mean for them to worship any other than Yahweh. It is significant, however, that five gods are mentioned and there were five gateways to the temple. If the four subsidiary deities are to be seen as a kind of heavenly court, evidence is that they were not adopted from the current neighbors, but brought with the Jews from Palestine. The "queen of heaven" mentioned by Jeremiah may be 'Anath. Since this goddess was also called 'Anathyahu, she might have been considered the consort of Yahu. Ishum may be identified with Yahu.²³ And, he seems to find a parallel in Jer. 48:13 "And Moab shall be ashamed of Kemosh as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel their confidence."

Others would see the religious practices at Elephantine, not as polytheism at all, but that the divine names are simply hypostatized aspects of Yahweh. The names would mean: Eshembethel—"Names of the house of God"; Herembethel—"Sacredness of the house of God"; and 'Anathbethel—"Sign of the house of God."²⁴

As related in the papyri, when the Persians conquered Egypt "the temples of the gods of Egypt they overthrew," but the temple of Yahu in Elephantine was spared.²⁵ Thus, we may suppose that they were never really popular among the Egyptians, for this act and for the simple reason that the papyri confirms the books of Ezra and Nehemiah in that the Jews did receive spe-

¹⁷ Ezekiel, 44:9.

¹⁸ A.P. 7.

¹⁹ Kraeling, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

²² Cowley, A. E., *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B. C.* (Oxford, 1923) pp. xxi-xxii.

²³ Kraeling, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

²⁴ Albright, W. F., *From Stone Age to Christianity*, (New York, 1957) p. 373.

²⁵ A.P. 30.

cial favors from the Persians. On a non-religious level, they were simply employed by an alien power. Nevertheless, apparently the Jews at Elephantine had lived on fairly friendly terms with their neighbors for at least 120 years by the time of the papyri. A document reveals the destruction of the Jewish temple by the priests of Khnum aided by the Persian commander Widrang and all sacrifice stopped.²⁶ There has been much discussion pro and con as to whether this act was based on religious or political reasons. There is evidence in the papyri to suggest both aspects as the cause of the trouble. It is from a man named Hananiah who communicated a decree from Darius II to Arsames for the celebration of the feast of Unleavened Bread and probably the Passover.²⁷ Doubtless, Darius was not interested in maintaining Jewish ritual. Perhaps he was authorizing something suggested by Hananiah or, according to Persian religious tolerance at this time, giving a yearly permission for the Jews in Egypt to take time from their duties to celebrate their holiday. The papyrus, however, gives instructions for the ritual procedure, indicating that this was either an innovation or else an attempt to bring the Elephantine Jews into line with post-exilic Judah regarding such ritual.²⁸

After the temple's destruction the —Jews complained to Arsames.²⁹ They

²⁶ A.P. 31-30.

²⁷ A.P. 21.

²⁸ Albright (From Stone... p. 345) thinks that the only thing really proven by the Passover letter is that the Elephantine Jews were considered as heterodox and probably still in a "pre-Deuteronomic" stage of religious development. While Kraeling (*op. cit.*, p. 95) feels that since an official edict from Darius II was obtained the letter would seem to mark an important innovation — the restriction of Passover to Jerusalem, but providing a suitable substitute for the foreign group by the feast of Unleavened Bread. Kraeling does not think the Passover was mentioned, due to the fact that the proposed missing passage: "you shall count fourteen days of the month of Nisan and then the Passover you will make," does not fill the gap in the text.

²⁹ A.P. 27.

also wrote to Bigvai, governor of Judah, Johanan, the high priest in Jerusalem and the leading Jewish nobles, but received no reply. In 408 B.C. they wrote again to Bigvai and also to Delaiah and Shelemiah, sons of Sanballat of Samaria.³⁰ The reply was evidently given orally and written down by the messenger. It is deliberately worded and states: 1. The altar-house of the God of heaven existed before Cambyes (its existence thus not being due to Persian policy); 2. In 410 Widrang destroyed it (putting responsibility on the Persians rather than on the Egyptians); 3. It should be rebuilt in its place; 4. Restoration should be complete; and 5. Meal and incense may again be offered (omitting burnt sacrifice).³¹

Many would see the destruction of the temple as a result of increased animal sacrifice in celebration of the Passover. The chief complaint of the Jews to Arsames is that the priests of Khnum would not allow them to sacrifice anything, not even meal or incense.³² It seems unlikely, however, that this could possibly be the only reason for strife between the Jews and Egyptian priesthood since there were certainly other cults in the area that practiced blood-sacrifice. The only possibility that the destruction of the temple was on a purely religious basis has been pointed out by Tuland who would see the key figure in these events as a man named Hanani or Hananiah who delivered the decree of Darius and is mentioned several times in the papyri.³³ In a book of Nehemiah there was a prominent Jewish leader alternately referred to by both of these names.³⁴ It is believed that Hanani is a hypocoristic form of Hananiah. This person is mentioned as being "the brother of Nehemiah" and Albright would see him as his true blood brother and identify him with

³⁰ A.P. 30.

³¹ Kraeling, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

³² A.P. 27.

³³ Tuland, C. G., "Hanani-Hananiah," *JBL*, Vol. 77, (1958), p. 158; A.P. 39:19; 31: 18.

³⁴ 1:2; 7:2.

Hananiah of A.P. 21. This particular Hananiah had been entrusted with important political and religious missions in both Judah and Egypt and is always represented in a prominent position. Since the religious practices of the Elephantine Jews were hardly those of their brothers in Babylon and Judah, perhaps this was just the man to bring them into line. He would also, perhaps, have had some influence in the court of Darius. If this is the brother of Nehemiah, on the basis of his character and religious zeal, he was probably not satisfied only to deliver the message but tried to introduce some religious reform comparable to that of Judah.³⁵ Since conditions in Elephantine were not exactly conducive to any very radical changes, perhaps the priests of Khnum and the other residents considered this proposal of reforms to the Jews, brought by a Persian messenger, as an unfavorable act against their own form of worship. Apparently the Jewish leaders felt very bitter against the man, for in 415 B.C. they wrote: "So when they find no fault in you, they will acknowledge to you that Khnum is against us from the time Hananiah was in Egypt until now."³⁶

The most reasonable probability is, however, that the changed attitude toward the Jews was rooted in politics and not religion. With the Persian conquest the Jews entered the service of the oppressors of Egypt just as easily as they had served under native rule. At the accession of Darius II in 424 B.C. a revolt broke out, but the Jews remained loyal, probably even helping put down rebellion. We also know from the papyri that Arsames was away from Egypt for three years during which time the destruction of the temple occurred. From his correspondence to the *peqidh* in charge, we know that this was an interval of disturbances and minor revolts. Whether his departure was a signal for revolt or a revolt

caused his departure we have no way of knowing. But when a strongly nationalistic Egypt was governed by a *peqidh* who was a native, on orders from an absentee satrap would seem the perfect time for the temple to be attacked in the course of other things—simply because the opportunity presented itself. Also, if there was a general revolt at this time, chances are that the Jews were remaining loyal, just as they had in 424 B.C., no doubt infuriating the population to seek revenge. The Brooklyn papyrus no. 12, however, written some years after these events, seems to ascertain that the temple was rebuilt since Yahu, the god, still dwells in Yeb the fortress.

In 404 B.C. Egypt revolted and won temporary independence under Amyrtaeus of Sais (404-399 B.C.). Since Persian rule was still recognized in Elephantine December 12, 402 B.C., apparently the first years of this pharaoh's reign coincided with the first years of Artaxerxes II.³⁷ In Brooklyn papyrus no. 13 a letter from Shewa bin Zekariah to Yislah mentions the accession of Nephertites I (399-393 B.C.). This is the last datable text and indicates that the colony came to an end during this king's reign. From Mendes in the Delta came a new dynasty which worshipped a ram-god and probably had a new influence on the Khnum priesthood at Elephantine.³⁸ Widrang, the commander, is also mentioned in this text and may have been sent by the new ruler to take his revenge. This may have been the very vengeance threatened by Jeremiah, "Behold, I watch over them for evil, and not for good; and all the men of Judah that are in the land of Egypt shall be consumed by the sword, and by famine, until there be an end to them."³⁹ At this point Elephantine lost its importance and the Jews who did not perish disappeared as mysteriously as they had come.

³⁵ Neh. 1:3-4; 2:1-8; 5:14; 7:2.

³⁶ A.P. 38.

³⁷ Kraeling, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 112.

³⁹ 44:27.

These papyri have a considerable importance for biblical studies. Other than the purely technical importance of increased knowledge of Aramaic language under the Persian empire, they contributed immensely to our knowledge of the social, domestic, economic and administrative facets of Egypt during this period. In addition, the results obtained from the study of the double-dated papyri can be used for a reconstruction of the Jewish calendar of the fifth century B.C.⁴⁰ This, coupled with the mention of names of the Persian governor Judaea and the current high priest at Jerusalem, established a new solidity for contemporary Old Testament chronology.

According to Neh. 3:1 Eliashib was a high priest at Jerusalem when Nehemiah returned about 445 B.C. In Neh. 12:22 this priest's successors, in order, were Joida, Johanan, and Jaddua. The papyri established Johanan as high priest in 419 B.C. Ezra 10:6-8 states that Ezra went to the chamber of Johanan and from that place issued proclamations. This implies that Ezra came to Jerusalem not under Artaxerxes I, but Artaxerxes II (supposedly July 31, 398 B.C.).⁴¹

If the Passover letter of 419 B.C. proves that the colony was in a pre-Deuteronomic stage of religious development, it may help shed a little light on the same situation in Judah. It also emphasizes the importance of Ezra's work in forming the Pentateuch into a coherent body of literature and his reforms may well be seen against the contrast of the Elephantine Jews who may represent the uninformed masses of pre-exilic Judah.

Conclusion:

The occupation of Elephantine by a garrison to guard the border may have been as early as the 3rd Dynasty and, as the tombs of the princes of the area indicate, was most certainly well es-

tablished by the time of the 6th Dynasty. The papyri state only that the Jews were there at the time of the Persian conquest, and there is no present solution as to when they arrived so far south as Elephantine. I am inclined to agree with the assumption that they arrived at the time of Psammetichus II. The reason rests in the following: It is known that when the growing strength of the aggressive Assyrian empire threatened all the kingdoms of western Asia, it was to Egypt that Israel and Judah looked for help (usually in vain). Rab-shakeh, to the envoys of Hezekiah states, "Behold, thou trusteth upon the staff of this bruised reed, even upon Egypt; whereon if a man lean, it will go through his hand and pierce it; so is pharaoh, king of Egypt until all that trust on him."⁴² But if Egypt rarely gave effectual help, when the day of reckoning came and Nineveh was destroyed in 612 B.C., the Pharaoh Necho, rightly fearing that the new power might prove more dangerous than the old, marched into Asia to oppose Babylon and her allies. Josiah, king of Judah, tried to stop him but was defeated and killed at Megiddo in 608 B.C. It is probable that there were people in Judah who had not been happy with Josiah's promulgation of 13 years earlier, seeing Necho not only as a source of power that might help against the onslaught from the East, but being even pleased with the death of Josiah, who was probably still quite insistent that his reformation be upheld. A certain number might have joined Necho's forces and returned with him to Egypt being, therefore, in a sense, religious refugees. These, then, could have comprised the same group which aided Psammetichus II in his Ethiopian campaign, and who were the founders of the Elephantine colony. The fact that they were in a pre-Deuteronomic stage of religious development, however, was not by ignorance, but by choice. If we can understand the common Egyptian's

⁴⁰ Norn, S. H. and Wood, L. H., "The Fifth Century Jewish Calendar at Elephantine," *JNES*, Vol. XIII, no. 1, Jan., 1954, pp. 1-20.

⁴¹ Ezra, 7:7.

⁴² II Kings, 18:21.

feelings about his own religion, we can see yet another reason why these Jews could not have practiced pure Yahwism, but had to make it acceptable to the curious.

It is the writer's view that the Elephantine Jews were polytheists. Yahweh, Ishum, Harem, and Bethel, they most certainly brought with them from Palestine. The incorporation, however, of 'Anath as consort of Yahweh, may have been the very thing that had allowed them to live in peace with the Egyptians for so long. 'Anath had been a popular Semitic Goddess in Egypt from an early date and was seen as a Goddess of war, with a particular interest in horses and chariots, thus making her a very acceptable deity for a military garrison.⁴³ Therefore, it was a wise choice.

During the time of the papyri Herodotus visited Elephantine (c. 450 B.C.) and says that it was one of three Persian garrison centers in Egypt. (Others were at Marea and Daphne.) The fact

that he does not mention such an interesting phenomenon may be that since his favorite means of collecting information was by questioning the priests, he found the priests of Khnum entirely silent on the subject. This would suggest some kind of ill-feeling, probably due to political reasons, that these Jews were serving the masters of Egypt faithfully and were seen as Persian representatives who symbolized high taxes and occupied oppressed Egypt.

With the arrival of Hananiah, with religious reforms and an attempted purification of the cult towards the idea of worshipping only Yahu, religious strife, most probably, broke out. And at the first opportunity the temple was destroyed. Inasmuch as they so innocently applied to the high priest at Jerusalem, it may be that, although with the coming of Hananiah, they knew of the reforms, but were still stubbornly rooted in their particular religion. They had been away from Judah for long, had forgotten Hebrew, and had become complete assimilated except for their religion. They must have felt that their deities were helpers for Yahweh, their highest god, and that Jerusalem should issue no complaint.

⁴³ A twelfth century poem said of Ramases III "Montu and Seth are with him in the fray; Anath and Astrate are a shield to him" (Pritchard, James B., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Related to the Old Testament*, Princeton, 1955, p. 250).

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