

ARTICLE VI.

THE ARAMAIC PAPYRI FOUND AT ELEPHANTINÉ.

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A CONSIDERABLE number of Aramaic papyri have recently been found at Elephantiné, opposite Assuan, four hundred miles south of Cairo. These Aramaic manuscripts are fully fifteen hundred years older than the oldest Hebrew parchment of the Bible. It is manifest, from the exclamations of Semitic scholars when they were published, how important they are.

Staerk, who published an edition of some of them, regards this contribution to biblical history as "equal in value to the most important cuneiform inscriptions." Steurnagel refers to them as "a bright, clear spot in an obscure period of Jewish history." Stanley A. Cook says that they will occupy "a prominent place in future biblical research." Lidzbarski calls them "unique for Semitic antiquity." Margoliouth thinks that they open "the wonderful prospect of a history of Israel based on authentic and contemporary records." Sachau, another editor, speaks of them as adding "a whole chapter as new as it is rich in contents." "That which directly concerns the Bible, as these do," Gunkel observes, "is more important than all other finds in the East." Clermont Ganneau said: "While they settle great questions they raise new ones." Bousset declares that these documents are "more important than all that has been found concerning Jewish history."

In the year 1901, a long strip of papyrus written on both sides in Aramaic was offered for sale at Luxor. This was published

two years later at Strasburg by Euting; but he did not know where it had been found. It was Ganneau who identified the word *jb* as Egyptian for Elephantiné, the only city in ancient times so near the tropics. He concluded further that the author was not an Egyptian, because he brought a complaint against the Egyptians; that he must have been a Jew, because he left off the divine title when he referred to the idol worshiped there; and that "there certainly must be at Elephantiné a nest discoverable of which we have only a small part of what must be hidden there still." Ganneau's suggestion was adopted, and by 1906 the Germans had begun digging, followed by the French soon after.

Meanwhile, in 1904, Robert Mond and Lady Cecil had purchased nine of ten papyri found there. All of these were edited by Sayce and Cowley and published in 1906. When Rubensohn, of the German Expedition, arrived, he first discovered the precise spot where the documents procured by Mond and Lady Cecil had been unearthed. He then proceeded to excavate in the same mounds, and was rewarded by finding on digging north, after less fortunate digging south, a large roll securely tied with strings, with seal unbroken. This bundle was taken unopened to Berlin, where it was given to the public by Sachau.

There were found in this bundle three letters. The ten papyri published by Sayce were family documents. The three published by Sachau contained official correspondence. The ten are dated from 471 to 411 B. C.; the three, from 411 to 408 B. C. They are all carefully dated, giving the year, the month, and often the day; and, with the names which they have preserved, they throw much light on this obscure part of Jewish history. They throw light on Jewish customs, on the calendar, on the Aramaic language, and on the script then used.

Some of the familiar expressions found in the later prophets startle one as they reappear in the papyri. "Governor of Judah," "Lord of hosts," found in Haggai; "Chemarim," the idolatrous priests mentioned by Zephaniah; "God of heaven," frequently met with in Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah; the word for "sheriff," found in Daniel, and the word for "palace" used in Esther, and no less than twenty-six biblical proper names recur in these papyri. The proper names (five out of six of them) are formed, as was the custom in the fifth century B. C., with *Jah* rather than *El*.

There is more than a general resemblance in names, for individuals appear who are identical with those mentioned in the Bible. This identity of name settles a dispute as to the date of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. More has been written on these books during the past fifty years than on any other equally small portion of the Old Testament.

A conflict was raging when the papyri were discovered. H. P. Smith, following Josephus, J. P. Peters, Marquart, Ottley, and Torrey, had declared¹ that Nehemiah was butler to Artaxerxes II., not I., as the tradition had been. But Nehemiah's era is accurately fixed by the papyri; for while Joiada the high priest, and Sanballat the ruler of Samaria, are named in Nehemiah as contemporaries in 440, in the papyri (thirty years later) the sons of Sanballat, Delaiah and Shelemiah, and the son of Joiada, Jehohanan, are named. It is thus definitely settled that Nehemiah lived in the days of Sanballat and Joiada, in 440, in the reign of Artaxerxes I., and not under Artaxerxes II., fifty years later. Winckler will not dare to say now, as he said not long ago, that both Sanballat and Bagoas are legendary characters, for both of these rulers figure prominently in the papyri.

¹ Old Testament History, p. 270.

The Aramaic sections of the book of Ezra had been treated as spurious by a number of leading scholars.¹

Cowley shows that there are many points of contact with the Aramaic of the books of Ezra and Daniel, Noeldeke re-read the Palestinian Aramaic to prepare himself to read the Egyptian, and Sachau calls the two identical. T. Whiton Davies, referring to the objections of Torrey, says: "The language of these books agrees so closely with that of the Aramaic papyri as to prove that they belong to the same period, viz. the fifth century B. C., though Torrey, in his latest contribution to the subject, makes a gallant but bootless attempt to prove the contrary."²

The Aramaic passages in the book of Daniel had been regarded as forgeries by another large group of scholars.³ Until these manuscripts were found there was little known of Aramaic as old as the fifth century B.C. If scholars had dreamed of such a discovery as this they would not have relegated the Aramaic passages in the Old Testament to the third or even the second century B.C.

But S. R. Driver himself admits, in the *Guardian* for 1907, that "there are many points of resemblance in the papyri to the Aramaic of Daniel." Macler, in the "Review of the His-

¹ Noeldeke, art. in *Goetting. gel. Anzeig.*, 1884, p. 1015; Graetz, *History of the Jews*, vol. ii. p. 87; Koster, *Het Herstel Van Israel* (1893); Wellhausen, *Rückkehr der Juden* (1895); *Encyclopædia Biblica*, art. "Nehemiah"; C. C. Torrey, *Ezra Studies* (1910), p. xi; R. Smend, *Old Testament History*, p. 344; Graf Baudissin, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (1901), p. 286; H. P. Smith, *Old Testament History*, p. 392.

² *Commentary on Ezra-Nehemiah.*

³ S. R. Driver, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 503; *Commentary on Daniel*, p. ix; C. F. Kent, *The Jews after the Exile*, p. 278; Wildeboer, *Literature of the Old Testament*, p. 440; D. G. Jahn, *Commentary on Daniel*, p. iv; J. P. Peters, "The Old Testament and New Scholarship", p. 294.

tory of Religions," goes so far as to say that the whole question of the date of Daniel is opened again. Owen Whitehouse makes bold to ask, "Are we, in the light of present knowledge, to allow the appearance of sporadic Aramaisms to determine the date of a passage?"

It was the Persian words found in the book of Daniel that had been looked upon as one of the strongest proofs of its late and apocryphal origin.¹ But Margoliouth points to the Persian loan words in the papyri; and hereafter neither Aramaic nor Persian words can be referred to as evidence that a book of the Bible must have appeared in the third or even the second century B. C.

A still higher interest attaches to these ancient manuscripts because they reveal the astonishing fact that there was a great and costly temple erected to the worship of Jehovah at Elephantiné. It had seven gateways of stone, a roof of cedar, basins of silver and gold, a vestibule with an altar on which meal-offerings and bloody sacrifices were placed, and another altar for incense. Jedoniah was the priest of this temple in the year 411 B. C.

The political condition of Egypt in this year may be gathered from the fact that while Darius II. the bastard was nominally possessor of the throne of Egypt, there had been in 415 a successful revolt, and in 408 there occurred a revolution, led by Nephertites, which kept the Persian troops out of Egypt for full sixty years. It was in 411 B. C., between these two uprisings of the Egyptians, when Persian authority was weak and easily defied, that the temple of the Jews was totally destroyed. Led by one Waidrang, the priests of Anubis, the ram

¹ Driver, Introduction, p. 503; Baudissin, Introduction, p. 622; Encyclopædia Biblica, art. "Daniel"; K. Marti, Commentary on Daniel (1901), p. xiv; Kent, The Jews after the Exile, p. 214.

god, took advantage of the absence of Arsames, the Persian satrap and defender of the Jews, to destroy the altar where their god, the ram, was sacrificed. Great was the lamentation of the Jews at the act of Waidrang, like the lamentation of the Jews at Jerusalem at the act of Nebuchadnezzar. Jedoniah the priest wrote a letter at once to Johannan the high priest at Jerusalem. This letter received no answer; so a second was despatched in November, 408, entreating help from Bagoas, the Persian pasha of Jerusalem, and from the sons of Sanballat, the rulers of Samaria. This letter says that Waidrang, the destroyer of the temple, had been punished, but that the temple still lay in ruins.

In the third letter the pashas of Jerusalem and Samaria expressed their sympathy, and promised to intercede with the Persian ruler of Egypt; but it is not likely that their intercession availed, for a successful revolution broke out in Egypt that very year and drove the Persians back to Persia.

The Jewish temple which was destroyed in 411 was built, these letters say, in the days of the Egyptian kings. As the Persians conquered Egypt in the year 525, this temple must have been built before that date, when an Egyptian dynasty was on the throne. Just when this colony of Jews settled there and built a temple to Jahu is still an open question. Smend, followed by Sayce, Staehelin, and Noeldeke, finds that this colony came after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586, when there was a considerable migration of Jews who took Jeremiah along with them to Egypt.

This position seems to be confirmed by the statement of Aristæas that King Psamtik I. about that time settled a military colony of Jews at Philæ to guard Egypt against the Ethiopians. At Abusimbel, south of Philæ, some of these Jewish mercenaries inscribed their names on the colossus of Ramses

there. Staerk, followed by Buhl, sees the colony start before the exile; and Eerdmans, J. A. Kelso, Israel Levi, and R. H. Kennett trace it more definitely to the period before 640 when Josiah ascended the throne of Judah. In 668 Assurbanipal invaded Egypt with troops furnished by twenty-two kings. Manasseh king of Judah may well have been one of them. Owen Whitehouse thinks that Hezekiah, the father of Manasseh, who fought, with the Egyptians as allies, in the year 701, against Sennacherib may have settled a colony there. Kautzsch proposes the year 722 when Samaria was captured and when some of its inhabitants may have fled into Egypt. Edouard Meyer prefers a date earlier still.

Whatever the date of the building of the temple may have been, whether in the eighth, seventh, or sixth century B. C., its existence in the fifth century removes the main stay of the Wellhausen hypothesis. His Prolegomena opens with the statement that "in the days of Jesus it was taken to be as certain as the unity of God himself that there could be only one place of worship." He makes a similar remark concerning the feeling of the Jewish exiles when they returned from captivity. "The principle," he says, "had become a part of their very being that the one God had also but one place of worship, and thenceforth, for all time coming, this was regarded as a thing of course." His main argument for dating Leviticus and the Priest Code as late as 444 B. C. is that at that time the high places and altars on every green hill which had been tolerated hitherto were now finally abolished.

He thought he was safe in making that assumption. That it was a mere, a false, assumption is proved conclusively by the witness of these manuscripts. They prove that both before and after the year 444 there was a second temple to Jehovah, with its priests and altars and sacrifices, on the Nile.

They prove that "the principle that the one God had also but one place of worship" had not become "part of the very being of the Jews" in 444 B. C.

They compel Wellhausen to choose a later date than 444 for the completion of the Pentateuch, because his argument has failed to stand at that point in Jewish history. But Wellhausen is precluded from choosing a later date, because about 157 B. C. the priest Onias IV., son of the high priest at Jerusalem, built a temple to Jehovah at Leontopolis in Egypt.

Therefore it follows that if Wellhausen's premise that Leviticus could not have been composed as long as the Jews had more than one temple is true, then Leviticus never was composed at all. But, as Leviticus is extant, Wellhausen's premise must be false, and the date of the appearing of that book cannot be determined by the presence or the absence of a second temple.

The existence of a second altar in 444 is not an argument against the publication of Leviticus in that year. The existence of a second altar at Elephantiné a century or two earlier is not an argument against the appearance of that book at an earlier date. When Antiochus Epiphanes deposed Onias III. at Jerusalem in the second century, a temple was built by his son at Leontopolis, and when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple in the sixth century, a temple may well have been built at Elephantiné by the Jewish military colony there. A writer in the *Journal of Theological Studies* for July, 1910, says: "A copy of the law must have existed in the Jewish colony at Elephantiné." Driver thinks that "it is not out of range of possibilities that a copy of the law may be found there."

If there was a temple built in the seventh century, as Staerk, Buhl, Eerdmans, Kelso, Steuernagel, Israel Levi, Kennett, Kautzsch, and E. Meyer contend, then the argument for

the composition of Deuteronomy in that century falls under the same condemnation as the argument for the composition of Leviticus in the fifth century. For Deuteronomy as well as Leviticus requires worship at one sanctuary. But, as we have shown, the non-enforcement of this law is no proof of the non-existence of this law.

Noeldeke and Schürer hold the opinion that the temple to Jahu was built in ignorance of the prohibition contained in Deuteronomy, but the great majority of Aramaic scholars hold that this temple was built not in ignorance or in spite of the prohibition uttered in Deuteronomy, but before the days of Josiah, when that book is said to have been written. But these scholars are confronted with a new difficulty; for, if this second temple was erected before the book of Deuteronomy was written, why was it not demolished as soon as that book appeared? Instead of that, it survived the publication of the prohibition of such worship in Deuteronomy and the reinforcement of such prohibition in the Priest Code. Its erection and survival as a temple cannot be charged to schism; for, after this old temple was destroyed in 411, the first thought of the afflicted Jewish colony was to turn for help to Jerusalem and to address a letter to the high priest there. As S. A. Cook pertinently says, "Several arguments no longer appear adequate and conclusive," and Margoliouth adds, "There is a wide gulf between the brilliant conjectures of Wellhausen and certain knowledge."

It was while the Jews at Elephantiné were offering sacrifices and burning incense to Jehovah that Malachi wrote: "For from the rising of the sun even to the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering." Long before Malachi, Isaiah had seen worshipers

of Jehovah at Sinim, the modern Assuan. "Behold, these shall come from afar; and, lo, these from the north and these from the west; and these from the land of Sinim" (xlix. 12). In another place he refers to Pathros or upper Egypt and the remnant of the people there. "Five cities in the land of Egypt," he says, shall "speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the Lord of hosts . . . in that day shall there be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the Lord" (xix. 18, 19). It was this prophecy that Onias IV. claimed that he fulfilled when he built an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, evidently unaware of the fact that it had been fulfilled centuries before in the temple built at Elephantiné, which is actually "at the border of the land." Long before the days of Isaiah, Hosea refers to the return of Jews to Egypt in these words: "They shall not dwell in the Lord's land, but Ephraim shall return to Egypt. Egypt shall gather them up. Memphis shall bury them."

It is too early to determine all that has been gained by the study of these old manuscripts for the elucidation of the Old Testament; but a few points have already been settled. The presence of Aramaic and Persian words in an Old Testament book can no longer be urged as proof that it is a product of the third or even of the second century B. C. The genuineness of the Aramaic passages in Ezra and Nehemiah is established, and the opposers are silenced as even Edouard Meyer, with all of his historical acumen, was not able to silence them. The date of Nehemiah is definitely settled. The date of the Aramaic chapters of Daniel is one of the new questions that will engage the attention of scholars. However that question may be settled, it is certain that this widely discredited book will hereafter be treated with more respect. Finally, by this discov-

ery of a temple to Jehovah, the foundation of the higher criticism of Wellhausen has been removed. What he will do to keep his structure from falling, no one can foretell.

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