

THE ELEPHANTINE PAPYRI AS ILLUSTRATIVE OF
THE OLD TESTAMENT.

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AT Elephantine these Jews coupled with Bethel a feminine deity—Ashima. This goddess is duly mentioned in Kings, and probably also in Amos; and, consistently with the environment of these heathen divinities, is associated with Yahu. The Biblical writer clearly connects her cult in Palestine with Bethel of Ephraim.¹ He writes (2 Kings xvii, 28) that one of the priests of Samaria “returned to Bethel and taught them how they should fear the Lord. Howbeit, every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the Samaritan high places, the men of Hamath made Ashima . . .”

This deity is connected with the feminine Syrian Sima, child of Hadad and Atargatis.²

¹ 2 Kings xvii, 28-30. In *Expository Times*, 1911, p. 73, Prof. Hommel discusses Ashima. He reads *Ashmat* in Amos viii, 14, “They that swear by Ashmat of Samaria, and say ‘as thy god O Dan liveth.’” The Ashima אֲשָׁמָה of Kings is ‘Αστυμάθ in the LXX, which shows that the translators knew it to be a goddess, and so gave it the Hebrew feminine termination.

² No. 6669 of Vol. III of the *Corpus of Latin Inscriptions*, a text from Syria, reads Iunonis Fil . . . Iovis Sim(ae). Another Greek inscription in *Revue Archéologique*, 1898, I, p. 39, reads Σημία. Another, found at Emesa, CEM(εα or α). A man in a Greek inscription (*Corpus Inscr. Graec.*, 9892), a Syrian, was called ‘Αβεδστεμός = עבדישמי, servant of Simi. Lucian, *De Dea Syria* speaks of a deity, Σημήνος, and Melito in his “Apology,” mentions Sime, or Seme. See also on a Hauran inscription ‘Αμασσημί. The Samarian triad, Bethel, Anat, and Ashima, may be equated with the later Syrian Hadad, Atargatis and Sima. Dr Ungnad, however, considers it to be improbable that the late deity Sima is connected with Ashima, or rather the ’Ašm of the papyri. He thinks that a preferable parentage for ’Ašm would be Ishum, the Babylonian deity of fire, comparing the Hebrew word *Esh* “fire,” and quoting 1 Kings xviii, 38, “The fire of the Lord fell,” and Habakkuk iii, 5, “Burning coals went forth at his feet.”

It is interesting to note that in 2 Chronicles xxviii, 13, M. René Dussaud would read that the Ephraimites cried out : " Ashima Yahu (אַשְׁמָתִ יְהוָה) is against us."

Anat was goddess of the Palestine town of Anathoth, and of Beth Anath and Beth Anoth of Joshua, close to Bethel, and this may account for her being reverenced at Yeb.¹

She was probably female counterpart as Anatu of Anu, or Anum, the Babylonian god of heaven ; and so called, as we shall immediately see, "queen of heaven." She is known to be a Syrian deity, from Phoenician inscriptions.² This worship of a goddess by the Jews was only too well known to Jeremiah as the common crime of his people then resident in Egypt ; and many of the evil doers were women, as he specially, and the papyri, set forth.³

His remonstrances to them were useless, they defied him : " We certainly will burn incense and pour out drink offerings to the queen of heaven as we have done, and our fathers, in the cities of Judah and Jerusalem."⁴ The idolatry had, therefore, in the past spread from the north to Mount Zion, as is absolutely confirmed by the Book of Kings (xxiii, 13), wherein we read of an image of Ashtoreth (or Astarte), the Sidonian Phoenician Sky-queen, having to be turned out of the Temple as late as the time of Josiah.⁵

Much of the evil doubtless arose from the mixed blood of the so-called Jews of the capital. Ezekiel (xvi, 3) says plainly of some of the populace : " Thy nativity was of the land of Canaan, your father an Amorite, and your mother a Hittite." Zephaniah takes

¹ Anu was "heaven" in Babylonian, and so Anatu, the feminine, meant "queen of heaven." The Bethany, of New Testament, may be "Shrine of Anath."

² Esarhaddon's Annals mention one Abd-Milkutti, king of Sidon. This theophoric name may be "servant of the queen of heaven," a plural of majesty for Milkat, queen.

³ Jeremiah xliv, 15 : "Then the men who knew their wives had burned incense to other gods, even all the people dwelling in Egypt, in Pathros (Upper Egypt), answered Jeremiah, saying, we certainly will," etc., etc.; also in the 9th verse "Have you forgotten the wickedness your wives committed in Judah and Jerusalem?"

⁴ A Carthage tomb inscription reads : "Grave of Ger-astarte, priestess of our Lady." This Notre Dame is the Coelestis, the Punic "heaven virgin," Tanit.

⁵ As late as Ezekiel's time Jewish women wailed for Tammuz, even "in the house of the Lord" (viii, 14). One of the stellar cults was that of מַזְלּוֹת, *Mazzaloth*, probably the Zodiacal signs.

up the cry against idolatry (i, 5): "They that worship the host of heaven upon the house-tops." Jeremiah (xliv, 9) asks of the Hebrews in Egypt if they had forgotten the sins which they and their wives had committed in Judah and Jerusalem, and (in xix, 13) he confirms Zephaniah as to incense burning and libation offerings to the heavenly host and foreign gods.¹ These illicit pagan cults seem to have culminated in a subterranean shrine, like the Mithraic caves of later times, which Ezekiel (viii, 7-12) found in Jerusalem decorated with bas-reliefs of idols. In it were men of the highest Hebrew families burning incense, one bearing the loyal theophoric name of Jaazaniah; and another, Shaphan, the "coney," has an appropriate one for such a cavernous cult.

The worship of the queen of heaven at Jerusalem was no mere boast of the idolatrous ladies, for Jeremiah (viii, 18) says: that "in the cities of Judah, and even Jerusalem's streets, they made cakes to the queen of heaven"—the counterpart of the Isiac cakes of Egypt, and forefathers of our hot cross buns. The cult of this Canaanite and Phoenician goddess has recently been much illuminated by an inscription from Tyre giving her the title of Astronoe (*see the Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, 1911, p. 332). Thus the whole forty-fourth chapter of Jeremiah is illuminated by means of these papyri.²

¹ It is interesting to note the verse in Jeremiah (x, 11) condemning the worship of other gods, such as Ashima: "The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, these shall perish from the earth and from under these heavens." It is written in Aramaic, as if specially aimed at some Aramaic-using Jews, such as those at Yeb. It is this verse that employs two words for earth, *arka* and *ar'a*; found among the Elephantine papyri. The curious instance of the non-winedrinking Rechabites, of Jeremiah xxxv, who are there said to have "gone after other gods," may mean they worshipped the Arabian deity, Sha'al-kum, "The God who drank no wine." There is a deity R-kb-el mentioned in an Aramaic inscription at Zenjirli, but whether he has any connection with the Rechabites is unknown.

² Chapters xlvi and xlvi are also a series of protests, after the capture of Jerusalem, against Hebrews dwelling in Egypt. Jeremiah curses any who should go: "Then it shall come to pass the sword you fear shall overtake you in Egypt, and the famine follow you, and there shall you die. O, remnant of Judah, go not into Egypt" (xlvi, 16); xlvi, 12, is in the same strain. As early as Jeremiah ii, 18, the prophet writes, after alluding to the Jewish settlements, Noph and Talpanhes: "and now what hast thou to do with the way of Egypt to drink the waters of Sihior?"—a reference to the eastern branch of the Nile which had to be crossed going from Judaea to Egypt. Later in Zedekiah's reign Jeremiah threatens: "thus saith the Lord, so will I give up the residue of

A list of subscriptions of two shekels each, for support of the Yeb temple, shows that women paid as well as the men ; and whilst 123 shekels are earmarked for Jehovah or Yahu, no less than 190 are devoted to the two other deities. They probably, however, included other Palestine people than pure Jews or Judahites, such as Samaritans and Ephraimites. These may also have revered Yahu, but even if so, they were polytheists all the same, and they appear in some cases to have thought higher of Anat, Ashima, and Bethel. It would seem that a number of these folk came from North Palestine, where Bethel was a holy place, because gods mentioned, other than Yahu, have titles compounded with Bethel.¹

It may be suggested that as these papyrus writings are in Aramaic, their authors were not Jews but Syrians, who would reverence various deities, or that they were Samaritans, who would not object to multiple Yahweh shrines, because they possessed one such upon Mount Gerizim. But a study of the documents decides absolutely that many were Jews. It should be remembered, too, that parts of the Books of Daniel and Ezra are known only in Aramaic,² whilst it is still more remarkable that a single sporadic Aramaic verse appears in Jeremiah x, 11. In this verse some critics had argued that the words for "earth" were later than the assigned date of Jeremiah, and that this part of his book must have been produced subsequent to his era. We now see, by means of the new-found writings, that these very words (*arkā* and *ar'a*) were in usage in the papyrus texts as early as the fifth century B.C.³

That there were genuine Jews at Aswan is proved also by an

Jerusalem, and them that dwell in the land of Egypt" (xxiv, 8). He himself may have been in Egypt for he alludes (in xlvi, 11) to the recipes of their medical papyri, several manuscripts of which we now have. He calls Egypt a heifer, alluding to the Hathor cow deity of Thebes. In verse 21 he makes an interesting comment on the common Egyptian practice, so often fatal to her, of employing mercenary troops : "Her hired men turned and fled away." Verse 9 specifies these condottieri as Lydians, Ethiopians, and Libyans. Urijah, whose views were identical with Jeremiah's, finding them unpopular, fled to Egypt. The intercourse between the two nations was, however, so intimate that the Egyptian police permitted Jehoiakim to send men and fetch Urijah away to his doom, as if there were some extradition treaty.

¹ 1 Kings xii, 29, says that Jeroboam placed another calf statue at Dan.

² Cf. Ezra iv, 7, where Jews send an Aramaic letter to Artaxerxes.

³ See above, p. 140, n. 1.

Aramaic inscription found there, dated in the 7th year of Artaxerxes, wherein a certain Abd-marna calls himself Chief of the garrison, and the internal evidence of the new manuscripts shows that the majority of the Jews referred to therein were soldiers. Moreover, the Yeb papyri several times call the people Jehudin, and term their men the Jewish army, or guard.¹ In connexion with this fact it is interesting to note that two common words for military matters in Egyptian are identical with Hebrew ones.² These are *N-r-n*, “warriors,” Hebrew *nəṣārim* (נְשָׁרִים) and *D-b-i*, “army” (צְבָא). It would seem that Jewish troops had been so often employed that Hebrew terms connected with hostilities were imported into the Egyptian lexicon.

The information derivable from the papyri themselves tends to prove that their cousins, the Jerusalem Jews, considered that the worships being carried on at Yeb were illegitimate. Probably they took this view, not only because for them no shrine to Jehovah should exist outside Sion, but also on account of the association at Elephantine of other deities as a cortège to Jehovah. For this cause, the first petition for reinstatement of the Yeb edifice, which was addressed to Bagoas, Pehah, or Satrap of Palestine, Yohanan the High Priest, and Ostan, brother of Anani, a Jewish notable, never received any reply. It may be surmised that this result was more because of the semi-polytheistic cult of the Yeb garrison than merely for the reason that Yohanan was rigidly opposed to an extra Palestinian temple to Jehovah. For he was not likely to have been hyper-conservative, his grandfather, Eliashib, having, when High Priest, permitted Tobiah, an abhorrence to the single-temple party, to re-enter the sacred courts; notwithstanding that Ezra had obtained the exclusion of Tobiah, and of his mother because she was an Ammonite. Also Yohanan’s brother had married Sanballat’s daughter. Sanballat was not a person of rigid views, for, because of his latitudinarianism, Nehemiah expelled one of his sons-in-law, Manasseh, from the temple precincts.

Conscious that their unorthodoxies had precluded success for

¹ Cf. Zephaniah’s mention of Ethiopian warfare, Zephaniah ii, 12. A little later, the Jews were used as soldiers by Ptolemy Soter, who after his victory at Gaza, not only placed a Jewish colony at Alexandria but allotted Jews as garrison to various fortified places in Egypt, according to Josephus.

² See Alan H. Gardiner on *Papyrus Anastasi I, The Travels of a Mohar and the Hebrew Old Testament*.

their first petition,¹ the Yeb council forwarded a second one to Bagoas, as Persian governor responsible for Jews under the Empire, and not to anyone at Jerusalem except the two sons of Sanballat, ruler of Samaria. They were doubtless selected because many of the Yeb people were Samaritans, and also knowing that Delaiah and Shemaiah were not strict single-shrine adherents. Their names, however, "Yahweh has freed" and "Yahweh heareth," suggest that, although Nehemiah complained of his being a Horonite, Sanballat worshipped the Hebrew God.²

The reply to the second application tends to confirm these views. It gave permission concerning the "altar house of the God of heaven," not "the house of God," but that of the—or of an—altar of God, as if these terms were used to conciliate the stricter Palestine Jews, who had given no help to the first petition because they deemed the whole Yeb temple cult unorthodox. Moreover, the permit only granted them leave for presenting meal offerings and frankincense. The immolations of animals, such a chief portion of the Jehovah ritual, and which the Yeb officiants had carried on before, were refused. Thus the Egyptian sacrifices would never completely rival those of Jerusalem, and the exasperation of the native Egyptian population because of the sacrifice of animals whom they worshipped, particularly Khnoum, the sheep (or ram) god, would not recur.

An interesting matter connected with the Old Testament is that the papyri use the Babylonian names for the months. Zechariah and Esther (post-Exilic books) give both the older numbers for the month and the Babylonian names also. Nehemiah gives the foreign names except once, when referring to a Hebrew function of Ezra's, where we have the month's number. Esther and Zechariah employ duplicate titles, thus showing that in their time the two forms for the calendar were familiar to them, viz., the Jewish, in which the lunar months had each its number, and the Babylonian, used officially at their era (the Persian) in Judea and also at Yeb, with names for each month. Practically Nehemiah, being a semi-official of Persia, employs only the Mesopotamian names, and the

¹ The Yeb colony must have gone to great expense to secure cedarwood for their temple roof, so as to imitate the building at Jerusalem. Acacia, used largely for the Egyptian temples, these Jews evidently considered unworthy of Yahu.

² The writing of Sanballat's name in the papyri (Sanaballat) is a more correct transcription of the Asssrian Sinuballit.

same are used in the Elephantine texts. This is strong proof that the previous Old Testament books, including Deuteronomy, were all composed before the Captivity.

If much of the Mosaic law, as some German critics contend, is of Babylonian origin, why does the Pentateuch know nothing of the month-names used among the people from which its codes were derived ?

One or two scholars have argued that the papyri are forgeries. Their internal evidence, however, renders this view untenable. For instance, one of the documents is a duplicate, in Aramaic, of the Babylonian version of the trilingual decree of Darius, engraved by his orders upon the Rock at Behistun. (By means of the new papyrus text we can now decide definitely a matter which was doubtful before, that the name of the month in which the revolters were defeated was Tammuz.) Again, a Persian term for a weight hitherto known only in that language, Karasha, occurs in these memoranda. Many words previously mysterious in Ezra and Daniel now come to light as being common at their era. In Daniel iii, 2, there are titles of three Persian officials which are now explained, one of these, Databari, also occurs in late Assyrian or Perso-Assyrian tablets from Niffer. The strange word rendered "wall" in Ezra v, 3 and 9, occurs, as also a word used in Esther for a Persian royal edict, and **פָרַתְּךָ** (an Iranian term for *fratara*) for "princes" in Esther i, 3 ; vi, 9 ; and Daniel i, 3.

In concluding this part of the subject some remarks recently made by Prof. Edouard Naville are particularly appropriate in reference to the question whether the Jews at Yeb may not have thought that their erection of a shrine to Jehovah abroad was a proper action. M. Naville points out that no fixed single and unchangeable place of residence for God in Palestine was set apart until Solomon's time, and this was in accordance with Jehovah's instructions. In Deuteronomy xii, 5, the Jews were foretold that it was not until they should have passed over Jordan, and subsequent thereto when later they had rest from their enemies there, that then "it shall come to pass that the Lord your God will choose a place for His Name to dwell and therein shalt thou offer," etc. Although, subsequently, the prophets told the Jews in Palestine that at Zion only should Jehovah be worshipped, and Deuteronomy indicates the same ultimate injunction, the Elephantine colonists may well have thought that, as they could not live in Palestine, they did no wrong

in having a temple of Yahu at Yeb. For, at a later era, they were in some respects still as were their ancestors when in the desert. They were also not dwelling over the Jordan or "resting in their inheritance," and so they may have considered themselves justified in doing what was right in their own eyes.¹

So under these circumstances they thought it best, directly they found they would be permanently stationed at Elephantine, to build Jehovah a sanctuary. When in Assyria they did not do so because they were forcible captives, and God had promised they should return home. At Yeb, on the other hand, they were voluntary emigrants and intended to stay.²

It is worth adding that the idea among the Jewish Diaspora that it was legitimate to have a place of worship for Jehovah in Egypt, lasted well into the Christian era; for in the last of the Sibylline Books, V, lines 501, 502, occurs this passage: "And then, in Egypt, there shall be a great and holy temple, and to it the people whom God made shall bring sacrifices. To them God shall grant a life without decay." These words were written after the temple of Onias had been destroyed by Vespasian, probably in the reign of Hadrian.

¹ Deuteronomy xii, 8 seq.: "Ye shall not do after the things that we do here this day, every man what is right in his own eyes, for ye are not yet come to the inheritance which the Lord your God giveth to you."

² Père Lagrange, in the *Revue Biblique*, 1912, gives some interesting calculations as to the numbers of monotheistic Yahu worshippers and the polytheists at Yeb, which he acutely derives from the lists of subscribers to the temple funds, collected by Jedoniah. The sums are given in keresh and ordinary shekels: the keresh = 20 half (or ordinary) shekels. The polytheistic worship tribute amounted to 19 keresh, paid by the adherents of Ashni-bethel or Anath-bethel, which reckoning two for each person, the allotted amount, makes 380 shekels for 190 persons. For Yahu 12 keresh (6 shekels) was paid, making 246 shekels for 123 of the faithful. He points out that Ashni-bethel was certainly a divinity name because in Papyrus 24, l. 6, we have the name שְׁמַכְדָּרָן. The non-orthodox residents therefore quite outnumbered the "Yahuists." One may add that Papyri Nos. 15 and 6 use the plural word "Gods," and that from another of the papyri we learn that the Yeb Jews, tattooed their slaves with a Yod, probably the initial of Yehudi, to prove Jewish ownership. This is contrary to the precept in Leviticus (xix, 28): "Ye shall not print any mark upon you."