

The Origin of the Jewish Colony of Syene (Assuan)

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THE JEWISH QUARTERLY REVIEW

APRIL, 1907

THE ORIGIN OF THE JEWISH COLONY OF SYENE (ASSUAN).

AMONG the numerous members of the Jewish colony of Syene, who are named in the noteworthy Aramaic Papyri, acquired by Lady Cecil and Mr. Mond, and edited by Sayce and Cowley, the occurrence of persons named Hosea (הושע) is especially frequent. As witnesses we find subscribed in Papyrus B.: Hosea son of Peti-ḥnûm (הושע בר פטחנום) line 17; in Document C.: Hosea son of Pelaliah (הושע בר פלליה) line 17 Hosea son of Re'ûyah (הושע בר רעויה) line 21, and Hosea son of Yigdal (הושע בר יגדל) line 22. The last-named three Hoseas also appear in Papyrus D. (lines 30, 33, and 34). As a householder we find in Papyrus J. (line 5) Hosea son of Uriah (הושע בר אוריה), and his son is twice named in the same document (lines 17, 20) as Yedoniah son of Hosea (ידיניה בר הושע), and once (line 2) as Yedoniah son of Hoshaiā son of Uriah (ידיניה בר הושעיה) (בר אוריה), where Hoshaiā (הושעיה) is an erroneous elongation of Hosea (הושע). Further, a witness in Papyrus A. (line 17) is named Shemaiah son of Hosea (שמעיה בר הושע); another witness in B. (line 18), Meshullam son of Hosea (משלם בר הושע), while in E. (line 14) there is mentioned a house-

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holder named Gadôl son of Oshea (גדול בר אושע), where Oshea (אושע) is the same as Hosea (הושע), just as אושעיה in H. 18 is the same as הושעיה in A. 19.

Now this frequency of the name Hosea may possibly be a clue to the origin of this Jewish colony in Upper Egypt. In the Bible, the name Hosea is almost exclusively applied to Ephraimites. The oldest bearer of the name is Hosea son of Nun of the Tribe of Ephraim (Num. xiii. 8, 16; Deut. xxxii. 44). The Book of Chronicles (I. xxvii. 20) names as Prince of the Tribe of Ephraim in the time of David, Hosea son of Azariah. The great Prophet of the Northern Kingdom, probably an Ephraimite, was Hosea son of Beëri; and the last king of this realm was Hosea son of Elah. The name Hosea occurs elsewhere only once, namely in Neh. x. 24. This solitary exception does not hinder us from concluding that the name Hosea was specially common in the Northern Kingdom, and particularly in the Tribe of Ephraim.

As, then, this name appears in the colony of Syene and Elephantine as one of the commonest personal names, it seems reasonable to suggest that this colony, at least in part, consisted of descendants of people belonging to the Ten Tribes.

The same conclusion is confirmed by frequent use of another personal name, Menaḥem (מנחם). Among the witnesses in Papyrus G. (line 38) occurs Menaḥem son of Zaccur (מנחם בר זכור); in H. (line 17) there is a witness Menaḥem son of Gadôl (גדול בר מנחם), and another Menaḥem son of 'Azariah (מנחם בר עזריה); in J. (line 18) witnesses appear named Menaḥem son of Shallum (מנחם בר שלום) and Menaḥem son of Gadôl son of Ba'adyah (מנחם בר גדול בר בעדיה); the last-named, simply as Menaḥem son of Gadôl (גדול בר מנחם), appears in K. line 15 (as well as H. line 17). In document H. Menaḥem with his brother 'Ananiah (ענניה) sons of Meshullam son of Shelomim (משלם בר שלום), are mentioned as principals. In the Bible the name Menaḥem only occurs as the name of one of the

last kings of the Northern Kingdom; he came from Tirzah (2 Kings xv. 14), and was thus in origin an Ephraimite.

The suggestion derived from these two names Hosea and Menahem may serve to throw a clearer light on the Jewish colonists settled in Syene. They were, in part at least, descendants of the Ten Tribes, who with the Persian army under Cambyses had come, from their second home in Assyria and Media, to Egypt, where they received grants of land (see Schürer in the *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, January 5, 1907, col. 6). In Syene they constituted a common colony together with Judeans, who had come to Egypt either direct from Judea or from Babylonia with the Persian army. The mixed character of the colony would explain the surprising circumstance that its members are sometimes designated Jews (Judeans יהודי, plural יהודין) and sometimes Arameans (ארמי, plural ארמין, ארמאי). As Jews would be designated only those members of the colony who came from the province of Judah (מדינתא די יהוד), or who were descendants of Judeans coming from Babylonia. On the other hand, the descendants of the Ten Tribes would be called Arameans. Perhaps the latter were so called in the lands of the Exile; or they may have acquired this title for the first time in the Persian army, where they were associated with other groups, really Aramean, because of their similarity in speech.

At all events, we may assume that the descendants of the Ten Tribes were not yet called Judeans in the time of the first Persian kings. When the Ephraimites found themselves in Assuan side by side with Judeans, and united in one community, both designations were applied to the members of the community, for the Judeans might also have been named Arameans because of their language. It thus came about that one and the same person is, in the Papyri, sometimes called a Judean, sometimes an Aramean; Maḥseiah son of Yedoniah is once called Aramean (ארמי), and on another occasion Judean (יהודי),

and the same is the case with Qoniyah son of Zadoq (B. line 3 ; A. line 2 ; B. line 8 ; A. line 2). As a curiosity, I may further note that in the Talmudical time the designations here used alternatively of the same persons (Aramean and Jew) were employed to express the religious opposition between Jews and heathens (see *T. J. Shebiith*, 35 b. top 1 : אי יהודאי יהודאי אי ארמאי ארמאי. Compare *Die Agada der palaest. Amoräer*, III, 586 ; 652, 1).

Perhaps we can thus also account for the surprising phenomena which the Syene Papyri reveal with regard to certain religious conditions : "the altar of the God Jahu" (J. line 6), the oath of the Jewess Mibṭahyah before the Egyptian goddess Sati (F. line 5). The mixed character of the Judean-Aramean community may possibly explain all this.

W. BACHER.