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From יהו מרא שמיא to יהה צבאת: Aspects of religious development on Elephantine

The extant documents written in the Achaemenid Jaho community on Elephantine date roughly from the beginning of the fifth century BC down to the beginning of the fourth and thus cover a period of about hundred years. Nevertheless, in the vast literature on this community the diachronic aspect of a religious development on Elephantine plays a minor role.¹ Some religious changes are obvious in the context of the appearance of Hananja and the ensuing conflict over the Jaho-temple and the sacrificial cult permitted in it, but they are mainly discussed as induced by external influence.² Thus, the struggle for permission to rebuild the temple after its destruction led to the cultic decision to renounce bloody sacrifices. But the extant sources make it clear that this decision had been a concession to outsiders who took offense at these sacrifices or were against the Jaho-temple because for other reasons. Whether these outsiders had been religious leaders from Judea, the Egyptian priests of Chnum or the Persians is a matter of debate.³

The fact that diachronic considerations have played such a minor role in Elephantine scholarship is certainly due to the fact that no religious or cultic texts have survived and thus the religious life of the Jaho community can only be inferred by indirect data.⁴ However, a diachronic evaluation of these data reveals the presence of religious development within the Jaho community.

1 In this paper, I restrict myself for the sake of space mainly to hint to the most recent literature which discusses the older contributions.

2 A rare exception is Rohrmoser's surprising statement in the summary of her book that the priesthood of Elephantine may owe itself to a development within the Jaho community, cf. Rohrmoser, *Götter, Tempel und Kult*, 375. Unfortunately, as far as I can see, this hypothesis is not further substantiated in the book.

3 Cf., e.g., Kottsieper, "Die Religionspolitik der Achämeniden"; Rohrmoser, *Götter, Tempel und Kult*, 56–60, 198–218, 238–90, 334–359; Becking, *Identity in Persian Egypt*, 128–46; Schipper, *Die Judäer/Aramäer von Elephantine*, 65–82; Becking, "That Evil Act," 194–201, and the literature cited in those contributions.

4 Pap. Amherst 63 does not come into consideration here, although it is quite possible – but not certain – that it was written in the Aswan area (Holm, "Nanay and Her Lover," 3; Holm, "Sacrifice

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Before turning to the texts, however, I would like to deal with the question of when at the latest a Jaho-community on Elephantine had been established.

The terminus *ante quem* is of course provided by the erection of the Jaho-temple. It is common knowledge that the Jaho-community itself claimed in 407 BC as an argument for the rebuilding of their temple that had already existed before the conquest of Egypt by Cambyses, i.e., before 526 BC.⁵ While one may question the extent to which the destruction of the Egyptian temples was carried out by Cambyses, there can be no serious doubt that the reference to a Jaho-temple

and Feasting,” 142). Since the papyrus was written at the earliest in the late 4th century BC after the end of the Achaemenid rule, it remains completely unclear in which relation the Jaho community of Elephantine of the 5th century stands to the syncretistic community which express their traditions in this papyrus (cf., e.g., Kottsieper, “Anmerkungen zu Pap. Amherst 63: Teil II–V,” 398–9). The fact that the Elephantine texts do not show such syncretism and that apparently the worshippers of the different gods which appear in the papyrus even in direct juxtaposition (cf. esp. VIII 1–7), still went their separate ways in the 5th century, means either that the group of the papyrus is not identical with these earlier groups or that it owes its existence to a later combination of different religious traditions after the end of the Achaemenid rule. However, the latter is rather unlikely, since the papyrus itself does not contain any Egyptian influence and all its traditions refer to the time before the arrival of its group(s) in Egypt. Corresponding to this is the fact that the interpretation of the god’s name ‘-hr as Jaho as proposed by Zauzich (“Der Gott des aramäisch-demotischen Papyrus,” 89–90) is very questionable for philological reasons. Contrary to Holm’s claims (“Nanay and Her Lover,” 3; Holm, “Wandering Arameans,” 165; cf. also “Sacrifice and Feasting,” 141), Zauzich has *not* demonstrated the possibility of interpreting the demotic aleph at the beginning of the word as a spelling for *consonantal* [y]. Zauzich’s argument only proves that demotic *Aleph* (𐤀) could be used as a spelling for a *vowel* in places where the *yod* of the Phoenician-Aramaic alphabet was used as *mater lectionis* also for a *vowel* (cf. Kottsieper, “El – ferner oder naher Gott,” 51–2) – a finding that surprises no Demotist or Semitist – and that Demotic *ī* (the single read leaf) could also be exchanged by the *Aleph*. However, this is something categorically different from the assumed rendering of a *consonantal* [y] with *Aleph* which is – as one would indeed expect – consistently written with Demotic *y* (cf. already Vleeming and Wesselijs, *Studies in Papyrus Amherst 63* (1985), 40–1). By the way, also the information given by Holm, “Wandering Arameans,” 165, that the reading Jaho would be “accepted by most scholars but not Steiner” is misleading. It ignores the philological objections raised by me (cf. Kottsieper, “Anmerkungen zu Pap. Amherst 63: I: 12,11–19,” 224–5; Kottsieper, “El – ferner oder naher Gott,” 51–2), as well as the verdict of demotists like Quack (cf. “The Interaction of Egyptian and Aramaic,” 390); cf. also Salo, *Die jüdische Königsideologie*, 63–65. Thus, the *reading* Jaho is obviously not intended by the writer who uses ‘-hr for the god’s name. This of course does not exclude that this god was meant though with a different name or designation (thus. e.g. Steiner and Nims, *The Aramaic Text in Demotic Script*, 42–3). But even if this were the case, the difference with the Jaho community, who *called* their God simply Jaho, cannot be overlooked.

⁵ Cf. TAD A4.7:13–4; 8:12–3; also in A4.6:17, a letter from about 410 BC, probably the time “before Cambyses” is referred to. For the date of Cambyses’ conquest of Egypt cf. now Quack, “Zum Datum der persischen Eroberung.”

existing before Cambyses is historically accurate.⁶ Several reasons argue for this assessment:

1) If the temple had been built under the rule of the Achaemenids, then it would have been authorized by the Achaemenids and its destruction would have been an act against an authorized temple and thus against the Achaemenid government itself. Would there be a better argument to make before the Achaemenids authorities to demand the authorization for rebuilding the temple if you could adduce this fact? That the Jaho community did not adduce this striking argument can only be explained that it would have been a lie.⁷

2) Even if the community would have had reasons unknown to us to date their temple in the pre-Achaemenid time, despite it having been built only after Cambyses, such an assertion probably would be really dangerous. Given the archival management of the Achaemenid bureaucracy, it would have been quite optimistic to hope that the Achaemenid administration would forget that the temple had in fact been built under its rule. Thus, the Jaho community could easily have been debunked as liars to the administration which would have thwarted their cause.

3) The fact that the Achaemenid governors Bagohi and Delaiah themselves use the argument that the temple had been built before Cambyses in their advice to the Egyptian Achaemenid administration (TAD A4.9:4–5), clearly shows that the administration had no reason not to doubt this.

That a temple or sanctuary of Jaho existed on Elephantine already in Saitic times can be made probable on the basis of archaeological evidence. As the recent

6 The part of the argument brought up by the Jaho community that Cambyses destroyed the Egyptian temples might be exaggerated, though there are hints that in the context of the conquest of Egypt by Cambyses temples were also damaged (Sternberg-el Hotabi, “Die persische Herrschaft in Ägypten,” 114). But it is important to distinguish between the two different parts of the argument of the Jaho community (cf. Granerød, *Dimensions of Yahwism*, 217). That the temple was found by Cambyses as already built is different information than that it was the only one which was not destroyed. Thus, the possibility that the last information was not correct or at least exaggerated cannot be used to cast doubt on the first one as is done e.g. by Becking, *Identity in Persian Egypt*, 141–2; cf. Becking, “The Identity of the People,” 108, where he comments on the statement that Cambyses found the Jaho-temple already built: “this claim might be classified as an example of a ‘claimed tradition’”.

7 This also refutes Briant’s argument (cf. “Curieuse affaire,” 123–4) that the fact that Vidranga went along with the Chnum priests’ request to proceed against the Jaho-temple shows that the Judeans’ argument was not valid and that Vidranga knew this. If he did know, however, it must be assumed that it was generally known in the administration too or had come up at the latest during the trial of Vidranga (TAD A4.7:15–17; A4.8:14–16). But this would have exposed the “swindle” of the Judeans. If, however, the permission to build was nevertheless granted, it may be assumed that the statement of the Judeans was essentially correct.

findings and their interpretation suggest, a massive wall was built at latest during the reign of Amasis as a boundary to the northwest of the Chnum sanctuary.⁸ Von Pilgrim considers that “the advent of larger contingents of soldiers and mercenaries in the town created the impetus to wall in the temple precincts” (Background, 13) but this seems to be unlikely. Given the fact that the so-called Aramaic quarter which was constructed after 526 BC in the adjacent north-eastern area of this wall to provide houses for the mercenaries of the Achaemenid period, one wonders which “larger contingents of soldiers and mercenaries” von Pilgrim thinks of which would arrived in the Saite period. As is well known, there had been mercenaries on Elephantine before⁹ and obviously during this time there was no need to build a barrier between them and the sanctuary of Chnum. But given the fact that the temple of Jaho which was “built in the traditional Egyptian way with sun-dried mud-bricks” (Background, 11) is found exactly on the opposite site of this wall and thus this wall separates the Jaho sanctuary from the sanctuary of Chnum, it seems to be the easiest assumption that this wall was erected as a reaction to or in the context of the establishment of the Jaho-temple. There is a difference between strangers living in the neighborhood of your sanctuary and strangers building their own cult building next to it.

The construction of the Jaho-temple also led to the relocation of the old central main street. Obviously, the temple was built in the former area of the old main road that cut the island since ancient times. Based on the archaeological and epigraphic evidence, it can be assumed that this ancient road was routed around the north-eastern and north-western side of the temple as the “street” (ארה) or “Souq of the king” (שוק מלכה).¹⁰ Initially, von Pilgrim,¹¹ taking up a suggestion by Briant,¹² saw this as the reason for the action by the Chnum priests against the Jaho-temple, which was then broken up and rebuilt in a reduced size, so that the old street layout between the temple and the enclosing wall of the Chnum temple was now restored.

However, on the basis of further findings and their reassessment, von Pilgrim now concludes that the Jaho-temple and the boundary wall of the Chnum sanctuary were designed from the beginning in such a way that the main street, which would have been used partly also as “Way of the God Chnum” (תמי'א זי חנום אלהא), TAD B3.4:8; B3.5:10) for processions, passed between the two. Nevertheless, he still maintains that the later action against the temple of Jaho, which probably did not lead to the destruction of the buildings but only to some damages, had a

⁸ Cf. von Pilgrim, “On the Archaeological Background,” 13.

⁹ See, e.g., the Stele of Ns-Hr treated below.

¹⁰ Cf. von Pilgrim, “Tempel des Jahu,” 315.

¹¹ Cf. von Pilgrim, “Elephantine,” 262–4; von Pilgrim, “Tempel des Jahu,” 315–7.

¹² See Briant, “Curieuse affair,” 123–8; but cf. above, note 8.

juridical background. Thus, he speculates that the Judeans would have illegally extended the temple afterwards into the area of the street.

With this change of von Pilgrim's argument there is no longer need to assume that the Jaho-temple had been built only in the 5th century B.C. Nevertheless, considerable doubts also about this interpretation arise. The main observations that justify these doubts are:

1) The extension of the temple area into this street cannot be proved archaeologically and therefore remains completely speculative.

2) If one follows the scale of the map provided by von Pilgrim,¹³ this obviously important processional road would have been only about 2–3 m wide, which does not exactly speak for the importance of the road, especially since the road leading around on the other side of the temple was at least three times as wide.

3) While a boundary wall can be proved for the northeastern and northwestern side of the temple, such a wall – according to von Pilgrim – would be missing between the temple area and the processional way running southeast of it. Would the Jaho community have designed their sanctuary as open to a processional route of Chnum? This may be considered extremely unlikely.

4) If one follows von Pilgrim, then the “way of the god Chnum” would have led directly without demarcation past the Jaho sanctuary, but would have been deliberately demarcated from its own sanctuary with a strong wall, which would have been built as a demarcation to the foreign mercenaries. Why then was the wall not placed immediately northwest of the processional way as a demarcation from the Jaho sanctuary?

5) If for whatever reasons the Chnum community wanted to separate the Chnum sanctuary even from their own “way of the god Chnum”, which, as said, would be a strange assumption, then why did they not just build the Jaho-temple somewhat further to the northwest, particularly since the houses belonging to the later Persian time had not yet been built. Does this mean that the temple already existed and it was in fact the boundary wall to the Chnum sanctuary which finally made the processional way so narrow?

All these observations speak for the assumption that in the area between the Jaho-temple and the boundary wall of the sanctuary of Chnum no “way of the god Chnum” was existent. This accords with the fact that no positive archaeological evidence for the existence of such a way in this area for the late Saite and Persian period can be adduced.¹⁴ Nor is it contradicted by the fact that this way

¹³ Cf. von Pilgrim, “On the Archaeological Background,” 3.

¹⁴ Thus, von Pilgrim can offer just two weak, indirect hints for the existence of this way also at this time: it had been there in former times (“On the Archaeological Background,” 3–4) and a comparable way on the southeastern side of the demarcation wall would be archaeological excluded (“On the Archaeological Background,” 13).

was mentioned in the papyri as an orientation mark for the localization of a (single!) building-complex and thus could also be localized from it.¹⁵ Thus, it is mentioned only in the context of the house complex of Anani located northeast of the temple of Jaho (TAD B3.4:8; B3.5:10), being located beyond the “Way of the King,” which thus ran between these two localities. However, there is no evidence that the “Way of the God Chnum” ran further southwest between the Jaho-temple and the Chnum sanctuary.

On the other hand, as recently suggested by Quack,¹⁶ the “Way of the God Chnum” could be the one that led into the Chnum sanctuary through a gate at its northwest corner. This gate was probably opposite the northeast corner of the property Anani acquired, so the description that the “Way of the God Chnum” lay “below”, i.e. southeast, and the “Souq of the King” was in between, may well refer to this way.¹⁷ The expression could also well refer to a wider area or forecourt of the path that then led through the gate into the Chnum sanctuary. The assumption that the processional way had been diverted through the Chnum sanctuary or past it through the old city area at the latest when the Jaho-temple had been built directly next to the Chnum sanctuary and had been separated from it by the massive wall, is obvious, even if at the present time it can only be speculated where exactly it ran.¹⁸

Thus, the simplest solution is that the Jaho-temple had been built directly next to the Chnum sanctuary and the main public road was led around it on the other side while the procession way was led through or along the Chnum sanctuary.

Be that as it may, this finding suggests that the Jaho-temple existed no later than the time of Amasis.¹⁹ At the same time it results that the damages of the

15 Cf. von Pilgrim, “On the Archaeological Background,” 12.

16 Cf. Quack, “Stadt des Chnum.”

17 Probably later, this way was prolonged to the northwest leading to a small shrine and this extension was called by the Egyptians simply “Way of the God” (תַּמְוֹאֲנִי; TAD B3.10:9). That this designation is just a different name for the “Way of the God Chnum”, as, e.g., assumed by von Pilgrim, “On the Archaeological Background,” 12, is not convincing. It is mentioned for a way in the same area but not at exactly the same place.

18 Cf., however, the considerations about such a processional way branching off from the main road at von Pilgrim, “On the Archaeological Background,” 14.

19 Cf. also Barnea, “The Migration of the Elephantine Yahwists,” 103–18, who argues for the assumption, that the Judeans migrated from Syene to Elephantine during the time of Amasis but only “after their temple had been built and functioned there for some time” (116); but his assumption that they were settled on the island as “a replacement contingent” after a revolt during the time of Apries (110) is based on a questionable interpretation of the stele of Ns-Hr; cf. the discussion of this stele below; for an overview of the different views of the time of arrival cf. also Kahn, “The Date of the Arrival,” 139–164.

Jaho-temple, which even led to the cessation of the sacrificial cult in 410 B.C., cannot be interpreted as a consequence of an unlawful extension of the temple area to the Egyptian procession road, since obviously the procession road had not run between the Jaho-temple and the Chnum sanctuary for more than 100 years.

It should be noted only in passing that such a structural encroachment would not have justified the damage to the temple itself, even according to Egyptian law, as e.g. the Codex Hermopolis West attests.²⁰ The code does regulate quite clearly that in the case of such structural encroachment, the guilty party is obliged to undo it, though he himself may recover the material he used for the unlawful construction (VI 3–10), but VIII 1–2 also suggests that even in the case of a structural encroachment on a public road, only the extension is the object of the lawsuit, but not the original construction (cf. Rohrmoser, Götter, 257–8). Thus, one would have to assume that the entire construction of the temple was not lawful even at the time of the Saïtes. However, this would ultimately lead to the completely improbable assumption that the Egyptians would have tolerated this blatant breach of law and encroachment on public space by a not insignificant construction, which would have even affected an important road, not only during construction but for over a century. Moreover, instead of opposing its construction, they would have preferred to distance themselves from it through their own construction activity, i.e. the construction of the boundary wall of the Chnum sanctuary. Therefore, this interpretation, which would hardly be probable already with the assumption that the temple would have been built only in Persian time, as considered by Briant,²¹ is to be rejected as absurd in view of the result that the Jaho-temple dates at the latest from the Saïte period.

This leads to the question, why the Egyptians should have allowed or tolerated at all the erection of such a foreign sanctuary in close proximity to the Chnum sanctuary, which moreover massively affected the traditional topology of the island. Even if a sure answer is ultimately not possible due to the meager sources, the well-known stele of Ns-Ḥr (Hussein, 2016) from the time of Apries, the predecessor of Amasis, could offer a solution.

The inscription on the back of this stele reports in lines 6–7 about conflicts with the mercenaries stationed on Elephantine and in Syene, which also included people from the Levant. These had evidently rebelled – whatever that meant in detail – and threatened to defect to the Nubians. Ns-Ḥr, who was in charge of Upper Egypt at that time, emphasizes that he was able to prevent this change of sides, which would have been fatal for the protection of the southern border. In

²⁰ And as was adduced by Briant, “Curieuse affaire,” 126–7, still followed, e.g., by von Pilgrim, “On the Archaeological Background,” 14–5.

²¹ Cf. Briant, “Curieuse affair.”

doing so, he left further action to the pharaoh, whose reaction, however, has not been preserved. Since only two or three hieroglyphs are missing here at the beginning of line 7, the formulation: “What was done by his majesty was their ...” leaves many possibilities open. But one will agree with the conclusion of the latest editor of the inscription, Hussein Bassir, that “Neshor was able to reach a reasonable solution *accepted by all parties* at Elephantine, and stop the revolt of Apries’ foreign mercenaries.”²²

This event teaches that the mercenaries in southern Egypt were a power factor, and the Egyptians did well to secure their loyalty. A revolt or withdrawal of the mercenaries to the south would have severely compromised Egypt’s security, and Ns-Ḥr’s actions indicate that they were well aware of the need to resolve conflicts with the mercenaries *diplomatically*. Thus, the assumption that one could not expect the Egyptians to allow the Judeans mercenaries to build their own temple after the revolt and thus the temple should have been built before the revolt, is based on the further assumption that the Egyptians must have made no decisions in favor for the mercenaries.²³ But if Ns-Ḥr managed to get the mercenaries to end their revolt and return to loyalty with the pharaoh, it is likely that he was able to offer them something in return. It is tempting to assume that the right to build their own sanctuary at such a prominent place as the side of the central sanctuary of Chnum could have been part of the concessions made by Ns-Ḥr to regain the loyalty of the mercenaries and to convince them not to change sides. Or, at least, it could have taught the Egyptians that they had to improve their attempts to integrate mercenaries into the local society and thus made them open to the desires of Judean mercenaries, who might have arrived later, to establish a sanctuary not just somewhere out of the way, but in a prominent place. That the Chnum priests would not be amused about such a diplomatic decision is understandable and could explain why, in turn, they built a massive wall to demarcate their sanctuary from the newly build Jaho-temple.

Thus, it seems quite plausible that the Jaho-temple on Elephantine would have been built under Apries or Amasis – whether by Judeans already serving as mercenaries under Apries or by those arriving on the island later. It cannot be decided whether the massive dividing wall to the Chnum sanctuary was built together with the Jaho-temple or only later. In the first case the construction of the Jaho-temple would have to be dated into the time of Amasis and possibly attributed to new Judean mercenary groups, in the second case it would have to

²² Bassir, “Neshor at Elephantine,” 89; italics by me.

²³ Thus Barnea, “The Migration of the Elephantine Yahwists,” 108, following Anneler, *Zur Geschichte der Juden*, 105.

be considered whether the then later built wall did not replace an original wall of which, following von Pilgrim (Background, 13) nothing would have survived.

Be that as it may, also the early Aramaic documents found at Elephantine indicate a pre-Persian origin for the Jaho community, with the later documents bearing witness to a gradual “modernization” or assimilation of the community to the new Persian supremacy.

This is particularly clear in the designations of the deity itself. Though from the perspective of Imperial Aramaic grammar the name should be written as יהו with ו at the end, it never appears with this writing on the ostraca which can be dated to the first quarter of the fifth century BC. Instead, we find about sixteen instances written as יהה.²⁴ Since those ostraca contain messages between members of the local community, one may safely assume that the habit to write Jaho as יהה was common in the Jaho community of Elephantine at the beginning of the fifth century BC.²⁵

Apparently, this custom was maintained within this community until the middle of the fifth century. Thus, the spelling יהה is found twice more in documents written by Natan bar Ananiah in 449 and 446 BC (TAD B3.3:2; B2.7:14). But all later documents afterwards use the spelling יהו corresponding to the common Aramaic orthography. It is of particular importance that also the son and – as evidenced by his handwriting – also student of Natan bar Ananiah, Mauziah bar Natan, now – in contrast to his father and teacher Natan – uses the spelling יהו (TAD B2.10:6 [416 BC]; B3.5:2 [434 BC], 10; B7.1:4 [413 BC]). This suggests that at some point around 440 BC²⁶ the “official” Imperial Aramaic orthography יהו for the traditional spelling יהה had also been adopted by scribes within the Jaho community.

That this change from יהה to יהו is an alignment with the generally used orthography within the Jaho community is also supported by the observation that the scribes who did not belong to the Jaho community always wrote the name of God יהו. Thus, the oldest datable instance of the writing יהו can be found in the papyrus B2.2:4, 6, 11, which was written 464 BC in Syene by the scribe איתו בר אבא for the Khwarezmian Dargamana. Obviously, the scribe bears an Aramaic²⁷ or

24 See CG 30 r. 5; 40, v. 3; 41 v. 5; 56 r. 7; 70 (= D7.21) r. 3; 152 (= D7.16) r. 3; 167 r. 1; 174 r. 2; 185 r. 6; 186 (= D7.35) r. 1; 236 v. 4; J8 r. 6, 9; X8 v. 4; 14 r. 1; D7.18 r. 3; in CG 14 v. 1 and 103 v. 2 the last sign(s) are not preserved.

25 For an additional perspective on the divine element in Yahwistic theophoric names, see Porten, “Yahu and Its Cognates in Personal Names: The Problem of Yama,” in this volume.

26 TAD B2.7, written 446 BC, is the last text in which יהה is found; the first instance for יהו written by a scribe from the Jaho community appears in 437 BC in a document written by Haggai bar Shemaiah (B3.4:3, 10).

27 See, e.g., Grelot, *Documents araméens d’Égypte*, 462, 475; Porten, “The Aramaic Texts,” 158.

possible an Egyptian²⁸ name, but not a “Judean” one. But also the instance in B3.2:2, written in 451 BC, is found in a document written by a scribe with the Akkadian name בּוּנִי בֶר מַנְכִי,²⁹ who obviously was not a member of the Jaho community.

But also in TAD A3.3:1, a letter sent probably by a Judean stationed in Memphis Jaho is spelled יהו. Though, therefore, the sender probably belonged to the Jaho community in Memphis, we do not know from which community the scribe of the letter came. If he should have been a Judean of Memphis as well, this would be a proof that in the Jaho community of the residence city Memphis the official orthography was already adopted before 450 BC.³⁰ But he could be a professional scribe from any other group just writing the letter according to the dictation of the sender and of course using the common orthography.³¹

Thus, a clear picture emerges: though one would expect Jaho written as יהו in Imperial Aramaic texts and though this is accordingly found throughout the fifth century BC in texts not written by scribes from the Elephantine Jaho community, this orthography was taken over by those scribes only after 440 BC. Before, they adhered to the traditional writing יהה which reflects the Israelite/Judean orthography until the sixth century BC.³² This is also corroborated by the only other instance of writing -[ō] with ה, which is found in פרעה “Pharaoh” in A1.1:1, 3, 6, a letter written by the king of Ekron, Adon to the Pharaoh at the end of the seventh century. It does not only provide an additional proof for writing -[ō] in the Southern Levant with ה, but also a nice example that in writing foreign terms one easily could stick to a traditional orthography. But the fact that the scribes of the Jaho community on Elephantine kept this traditional writing for such a long time in accordance with their own normal writing system, even though in their environment the same name was already written differently, can be taken as a

28 For איתו one could compare Egyptian names like *itw* (Ranke, *Die ägyptischen Personennamen I*, 50, nos. 7–8); for אבא cf. e.g. אבא (Ranke, *Die ägyptischen Personennamen I*, 1, no. 21; Lüddeckens, *Demotisches Namenbuch*, 8).

29 For בּוּנִי see, e.g., Grelot, *Documents araméens d’Égypte*, 478; Porten, “The Aramaic Texts,” 206. The name בּוּנִי is found in Persian time as a name of a Levite (Neh 11,15), but the text seems to be corrupt (cf. Gesenius, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch*, 132, s.v. בּוּנִי). Given the clear Akkadian background of the father’s name, one best connects בּוּנִי with the Akkadian name *būnī* testified by Neo-Assyrian sources, cf. Radner, *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire* 1, II: B-G, 352.

30 According to Porten, “The Calendar of Aramaic Texts,” 17, the letter should even be dated before 473 BC.

31 The only remaining text which might date from before 450 BC and in which the writing יהו is found would be the fragment TAD D4.9 lacking any information at which place and by which scribe it had been written.

32 See, e.g., Zevit, *Matres Lectionis*, 24 and 31.

deliberate act of preserving their own religious tradition and identity, which they must have brought with them at the latest in the sixth century BC.³³

That the Jaho community continued to adhere to older Hebrew traditions into the fifth century is also evident from a look at the designation of Jaho as יהה צבאת (CG 167 r. 1; J8 r. 9). Since צבאת is derived from the root *ḏb'*,³⁴ which is supposed to appear as קבא or עבא in Imperial Aramaic, but in no case as צבא, the epithet יהה צבאת is a clear Hebraism. Given the fact, that in Hebrew the plural morphem *-[ōt]* was not yet written with ו in the seventh or sixth century BC,³⁵ the defective writing could have been taken over from ancient Hebrew sources, just as the ה in יהה, and thus there would be no need to assume a partial Aramaization of Hebrew *-[ōt]* to Aramaic *-[āt]*.³⁶

יהה צבאת is encountered only in ostraca from the first quarter of the century (CG 167 r. 1; J8 r. 9). Since only a few texts have survived for the second quarter, which moreover show no comparable epithets we cannot exclude that the term could have been used also after 475 BC.

However, this changes at the latest in the last quarter of the fifth century where new designations of Jaho appear in the text but not יהה צבאת.

³³ That Jaho as an element of personal names could be written on Elephantine at any time with יהו does not contradict this. One must distinguish between the explicit naming of a god as a deity in its own right and the use of its name as part of a personal name. Furthermore, since personal names serve to identify individuals, it also made sense to write the names in an orthography that would allow any reader to also correctly identify the name. Nevertheless, names with יהה are still common in the documents written before 475 (cf. יההאור TAD B5.1:2, cf. D3.7:2; יההרם B4.2:13; עבדייהה C3.4:6; against יהורם CG X17 v. 1 and יהוטל CG 42 v. 8; 115 v.7; 163 r. 3). Only after 475 BCE the writing יהו became mandatory in personal names. Since the writing יהה does not appear in Israelite/Judean inscriptions which normally use the longer version [yahnwē] (beside some possible instances of the short form [yah]; see Renz, *Handbuch der althebräischen Epigraphik* II/1, 89–90), this seems to be a spelling of the colloquial form [yahō] used in informal texts. Less likely, though not impossible, would be the assumption that the Jaho community chose this spelling ad hoc using the traditional Hebrew orthography when they established their Jaho cult on Elephantine to mark their god as their own and foreign to the gods of their environment. This would have been a very strong act of creating an identity as a religious group. In any case, the writing יהו is clearly a later adaption to the Imperial Aramaic orthography and thus cannot be used as an argument for an original Samaritan/Israelite background of the Jaho community as proposed by Barnea, "The Migration of the Elephantine Yahwists," 112.

³⁴ Cf. *ḏb'* and its derivatives in Old South Arabic and in some dialects of the North Arabian Peninsula; for this, see the information on the root *ḏb'* and its derivatives given in the Sabaean Online Dictionary <http://sabaweb.uni-jena.de/SabaWeb>.

³⁵ Cf. Renz, *Handbuch der althebräischen Epigraphik* II/2, 41–2.

³⁶ This does not exclude the possibility, that Aramaic speaking readers would have read the word with *-[āt]* – it is the (dis-)advantage of a non-vocalized writing system that a reader can adopt the written texts to his own pronunciation and interpretation.

Thus, in some texts אלה שמיא “the God of heaven” appears as a designation of Jaho, which, with one exception (TAD A4.7:28 || 8:26–7), replaces rather than supplements the name of God (A3.6:1; 4.3:3, 5; 4.7:2 || 8:2; 4.9:3–4). The designation is found especially in the prescript of letters in the context of blessings for the addressee:

a) In the formula אלה שמיא ישאל בכל עדן שלם “may the God of Heaven seek after the welfare of <the addressee> all them times”: A3.6.1, A4.3:2, A4.7:1-f || A4.8:1–2.1³⁷

b) Additionally A4.3:2–3 אלה שמיא קדם לרחמין הו קדם “may they (the addressees) be in favor before the God of Heaven”.

It is striking that in letters from the Jaho community from the second half of the fifth century, the שלם-formula is also used with other names of gods such as אלהיא כלא “all the gods” (A3. 7:1) or simply אלהיא “the gods” (A4.4:1), but never with Jaho. This is encountered only once in the first quarter of the fifth century on an ostrakon, though it remains unclear whether אלהיא or יהה [צבאת or יהה is mentioned there.³⁸ Be that as it may, evidently at the end of the fifth century, for whatever reasons, it was preferred to avoid explicitly naming Jaho in such letter-introduction formulas and to replace it with other names of God, although it is clear that אלה שמיא refers to Jaho.

That אלה שמיא was perceived as a special designation within the Jaho community is shown by the remaining evidence from letters attributable to members of this community. For example, in the aforementioned letter TAD A4.3, Mauziah reports to the leaders of the Jaho community that אלה שמיא helped the Egyptians Şeḥa and Ḥor in their advocacy of Mauziah before Vidranga. The use of this phrase both in the prescript and in reference to two people not belonging to the Jaho community is all the more striking, as Mauziah does use the Jaho name in reference to the representatives of the Jaho community, whom he refers to as אלהא כהניא זי יהו “priests of the god Jaho.”

The impression that אלה שמיא was perceived by the Jaho community as a designation of Jaho, which can have the connotation of relationship to the outside world, is confirmed by the letter to Bagohi A4.7 || A4.8. In this letter, too, אלה שמיא occurs not only in the aforementioned prescript as the god who is to take care of the addressee’s salvation, but once again at the end, where the senders assure Bagohi that his appearance יהויה לך קדם יהו אלה שמיא “will be a merit for you before Jaho, the God of Heaven” (l. 27–8 || 26–7). Although Jaho is mentioned here

³⁷ Cf. Schwiderski, *Handbuch*, 115–8.

³⁸ D7.35:1–2 אלה שמיא ישאל בכל עדן שלם יהה | ...] ל ישאל. Since the right margin of the ostrakon is completely lost, the reading צבאת suggested by Dupont-Sommer, “Un ostrakon araméen inédit,” 404–5) remains uncertain, though quite possible.

also by name, he appears explicitly as “God of Heaven” in his attitude against Bagohi, who does not belong to the Jaho community. In contrast, wherever in the very same letter the Jaho community of Elephantine comes into focus, Jaho is never referred to as “God of Heaven,” but simply as יהו אלהא “the God Jaho” used in the designation of the temple or the altar (A4. 7:6, 26; A4.8:7, 24, 25). And in the central statement about the fasting and prayers of the Jaho community itself they refer to their god as יהו מרא שמיא “Jaho, Lord of Heaven” (A4.7:15).

The background for this particular use of אלה שמיא can be seen in the fact that this designation was apparently established within the Achaemenid administration as a designation of Jahwe/Jaho. Otherwise it cannot be understood that the governors Bagohi and Delaiah in their memorandum to Aršames, in which they advise him to approve the restoration of the temple and to allow vegetal sacrifices again, refer to the temple simply as בית מדבחא זי אלה שמיא “altar house of the God of Heaven” and do not use the name Jaho (A4. 9:3). Particularly in the context of Elephantine, this designation must not only have been familiar within the administration, but also have had positive connotations, so that the senders considered it helpful to designate the temple accordingly.

How foreign this had remained to the Jaho community on Elephantine itself is shown by the fact that in their own letter, in which they offer a bribe to Aršames, they call the temple, as was usual with them elsewhere, the אנורא זי יהו אלהא “temple of the god Jaho” (A4.10:8).

That אלה שמיא is an Aramaic name for Yahweh that arose during the Achaemenid period can be demonstrated as probable by other observations. It is found primarily in biblical Aramaic texts, where it appears eleven times always in place of the name of Yahweh and never as an extension (Dan 2:18, 19, 37, 44; Ezra 5:11, 12; 6, 9, 10; 7, 12, 21, 23bis). Only rarely, and then only in recognized late sections, does its Hebrew translation אלהי השמים also appear in Hebrew texts of the Bible, though it is mostly used as an apposition to the name of God (Gen 24:3, 7; Jonah 1:9; Ezra 1:2; Neh 1:5; 2 Chron 36:23) and only in Nehemiah as a stand-alone name of God (Neh 1:4; 2:4, 20). More significantly, this designation disappears in the post-biblical literature. Thus, it is absent from Qumran and is mentioned in the rabbinic texts only in connection with its biblical evidence.³⁹ Only in the Palestinian Targum tradition does it occur more frequently as a rendering of שדי (אל).⁴⁰

39 The expression is also found only rarely in the Piyyutim. Since it is well known that the Paytanim used the Hebrew Bible *ad libitum* as a source for their phraseology, however, this cannot serve as evidence that the expression was in common use in post-biblical Judaism.

40 Tg^{Neoph} Gen 28:3; 35:11; 43:13; 48:3; 49:25; Ex 6:3; Tg^{Frg} Gen 49:25; Ex 6:3; Palestinian Targums from the Genizah (cf. Klein, *Genizah Manuscripts*) Ms. C to Gen 35:11 and Ms. D to Gen 48:3; Ex 6:3. Cf. otherwise the Targums to Ps 136:26 for אל and without a direct reference word only Tg^{Jon} to Lev 24:10 and the Targums to Songs 7:13; Qoh 10:10.

From this finding it can be clearly seen that the designation “God of Heaven” was evidently used as a primarily Aramaic designation for Yahweh in the Achaemenid period, but it remained largely foreign to the Jewish tradition and, with only few exceptions, was not further received. The most likely interpretation of this fact is that this designation was coined by circles who, in their dealings with the Achaemenid suzerainty, on the one hand wanted to lend greater weight to the significance of the cult of Yahweh as a cult of the “God of Heaven,” and on the other hand, by replacing the exclusive name Yahweh with the more inclusive designation “God of Heaven,” also wanted to open this cult to the outside world.⁴¹ This would explain why within most of Yahweh/Jaho communities this designation was received only sporadically and – as the evidence from Elephantine shows – more with regard to the outside world.

In any case, a clear distinction must be made between the “external” God designation אלה שמיא “God of Heaven” and the “internal” epithet מרא שמיא “Lord of Heaven” used side by side in A4.7 || A4.8. In contrast to external orientation of אלה השמיא, Jaho appears as מרא שמיא precisely in the context of the existential need of the Jaho community itself. One should note, that the former יהה צבאת, by which Jaho is referred to as the “Lord of the (heavenly) hosts”, corresponds very well to his designation as “Lord of Heaven”. Thus, it is quite possible to see in מרא שמיא the Aramaic replacement for the older Hebrew צבאת, which had apparently become obsolete – especially since the direct translation as יהו חיליא in the Elephantine context would certainly have been misleading in the sense of “Jaho of the armies (of Elephantine)”.⁴²

Be that as it may, these observations suggests that the designation אלה שמיא had not been part of the ancient tradition of the Elephantine Jaho community. On the contrary, it is probably an adoption of a terminology that emerged only during the Achaemenid period outside Elephantine with the aim of better integrating the cult of Yahweh into the context of Persian suzerainty.⁴³

⁴¹ This would be supported by the use of אלה שמיא by Bagohi and Deliah towards Aršames.

⁴² On the other hand, the connection of אלה שמיא, to which מרא שמיא would then be only a variant, with the well-known בעל שמים, which Meyer (*Der Papyrusfund von Elephantine*, 67) drew and which was then asserted in particular by Kraeling (*The Brooklyn Museum Aramaic Papyri*, 84), Niehr (e.g., *Ba'alšamem*, 191–5), and his student Angela Rohrmoser, *Götter, Tempel und Kult*, 120–1, cannot be assumed. It overlooks the different contexts and thus connotations of the two terms and cannot explain why they appear so late in the texts. And one should take the following critical remark of Bolin, “The Temple of יהו at Elephantine,” 136, seriously: “While the term’s origins may lie in Bronze Age Syria-Palestine, its meaning for a Jewish community in their correspondence with the Persian administration a millenium later is another issue.” For further interpretations of אלה שמיא and מרא שמיא cf. Becking, *Identity in Persian Egypt*, 36–8.

⁴³ This has already been considered by Rohrmoser, *Götter, Tempel und Kult*, 121–2, who, however, overlooks the difference between מרא שמיא and אלה שמיא (cf. the previous note).

This draws attention to another terminological innovation that can be observed for the same period and is closely connected with the intervention of the Achaemenid administration in respect to the calendar of the Jaho cult on Elephantine. However one may interpret the so-called Passover letter A4.1 from the year 419 in detail, it is clear that the sender Hananiah communicates decisions of the Persian central administration, which had been sent first to the satrap Aršames, to the Jaho community of Elephantine. In this connection, Hananiah also gives instructions for the date and some rules of a festival in Nisan, whereby it is disputed whether it concerns the Massot or Passover festival.⁴⁴ In doing so, Hananiah explicitly addresses this letter referring to cultic measures to the חילא יהודיא “the Judean ‘troop’” (l. 1, 10), which is also the first evidence of this expression.

That this designation obviously refers to the Jaho community on Elephantine is also made clear by its second record. Thus, the famous list of contributions for the temple of Jaho is introduced with the words: “This is (a list of) the names of the חילא יהודיא who gave silver to the god Jaho”. In fact, this list is a collective manuscript, in which individual lists of people from different groups were compiled. Thus, it begins with a small group of three people (l. 2–5) and ends with a large group of 91 people (l. 32–122). Both groups are not further specified. This is also true for two lists of seven and three more people respectively on the verso, which are added at the end (l. 129–38). Lines 6–31, however, provide two lists of individuals assigned to the military units of a century led by commanders bearing Babylonian names.⁴⁵ Since only 13 respectively 11 persons bearing Judean names are mentioned for each of these two centuries, it can be assumed that not all members of the mentioned centuries of Siniddin and Nabuakab belonged to the חילא יהודיא, but only those who counted themselves to the cult community of Jaho. חילא יהודיא is therefore also in this text related to this cult community, to which members of different military units could belong.

Another observation supports the assumption that the term חילא יהודיא means the Jaho community, although it formally corresponds to the term חילא סונכניא “the Syenian troop.” Thus, Haggai bar Shemaiah, who is known from several

⁴⁴ On this letter, see van der Toorn, *Becoming Diaspora Jews*, 120–4; Becking, *Identity in Persian Egypt*, 24–8; Schipper, “Die Judäer/Aramäer von Elephantine,” 67–71. The following argumentation takes up a thesis of Kottsieper, “Die Religionspolitik der Achämeniden,” 150–8, which has been adopted *inter alia* by van der Toorn, “Ethnicity at Elephantine,” 156 and van der Toorn, *Becoming Diaspora Jews*, 120–4, and adds additional observations to it. For a different – in my opinion less convincing – reading and interpretation see Barnea, “P. Berlin 13464, Yahwism and Achaemenid Zoroastrianism at Elephantine,” in this volume.

⁴⁵ See the closing l. 19 מאת שנון “the century of Siniddin” and the opening line of the next section, l. 20 מאת נבועקב “the century of Nabuakab”.

documents from the Jaho community on Elephantine as a witness and scribe (B2.7:19; 3.4:23; 3.8:43; 3.10:22; 3.11:17; 3.12:32),⁴⁶ is nevertheless attributed to the חילא סונכניא in the ration list C3.14:3 from the year 400.⁴⁷ If one does not want to speculate that this was a different person or that he had left the Jaho community at the end of his career, this is probably another proof, that one person could be member of a certain Achaemenid troop unit and the חילא יהודי at the same time. This suggests that חילא יהודי is not simply a troop designation, but refers to the members of the Achaemenid garrison who were also members of the Jaho community.⁴⁸

That יהודי has acquired a religious connotation even outside the designation חילא יהודי can be shown by further observations regarding the use of יהודי in other contexts.⁴⁹ Thus, in legal documents, the term יהודי זי בבירת יב “a Judean who is in the fortress of Jeb” or יהודי זי יב (בירתא) “a Judean of (the fortress) Jeb” is frequently found, but only until September 420 BC.⁵⁰ From October 420 on, bearers of Judean names on Elephantine are referred to by scribes belonging to the Jaho community as ארמי זי יב בירתא “an Aramean of the fortress Jeb” in such legal texts whenever Jeb is mentioned.⁵¹

Particularly telling in this regard is the latest instance of the use of יהודי in the first phrase. Thus, in B5.5:1–2 (September 420), Miptahiah is probably first referred to as a “Judean who is in the fortress of Yeb,” as it had been common in the documents written earlier. But obviously the scribe got unsure whether this would be still the right designation and thus he added the notion לדגלה ארמ[יה] „according to her detachment an Aramean”. Thus we can observe that with the year 420 the term יהודי lost its meaning as a simple ethnic designation and became a term connoting membership in the Jaho community on Elephantine.

That this was not a development in the scribal habit of different scribes is evidenced by the observation that two different scribes follow this evolution and

⁴⁶ Based on the handwriting, TAD B4.6 may also be attributed to him. The documents date from the period 446–400 BCE.

⁴⁷ Cf. TAD C3.14:3. The fact that Haggai does not appear in the levy list for the temple of Jaho is not a counterargument, since the list is not completely preserved.

⁴⁸ Cf. van der Toorn, “Ethnicity at Elephantine,” 154–155.

⁴⁹ For the older discussion of this subject, cf. now Barnea, *Yahwistic Identity*, who reaches a similar conclusion; I would like to thank the author for drawing my attention to this essay prior to its publication after I had completed my manuscript.

⁵⁰ Cf. TAD B2.2:3 (464); B2.4:2 (460); B3.1:3 (456); B3.6:2 (427); B2.9:2 (August 420); B5.5:1–2 (September 420).

⁵¹ Cf. TAD B3.8:2 (October 420; B2.10:2 (216); B3.12:2–3 (403); B4.6:2 (400); cf. also B7.2:2–3 (401) ארמי מהסן בי ב[ירתא]. This is also the case in D2.12:4 (403). The reading א[הו]י proposed in by Porten and Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents* 4, 71, would clearly be too long for the gap. In contrast, א[ר]י fits the preserved letters at the beginning and end and would fill the gap perfectly.

changed their habit accordingly. Thus, Mauziah bar Natan still uses the old formula in September 420 (B2.9), only to be the first to use the new formulation in October 420 (B3.8), which is then also found in the document B2.10 written by him in 416. And Haggai bar Shemaiah offers the old designation with יהודי in 427 (B3.6), only to use the new version with ארמי in later documents written by him in 402 (B3.12) and 400 (B4.6).

A last observation adds a small detail from the perspective of a non-Judean scribe outside of Elephantine. Thus, the Elephantine Anani bar Haggai is called – as expected – an “Aramean who is in the fortress of Jeb, belonging to the degel of Nabukudurri” in a document written by Haggai bar Shemaya on Elephantine in 402 (B3.12:2–4). But the very same person is called in the very same year by the non-Judean scribe Showeram bar Eshemram in Syene simply יהודי לדגל נובכדרי “a Judean belonging to the detachment of Nabukudduri,” while his counterpart is referred to as ארמי זי סון לדגלא זך “an Aramean of Syene, belonging to the same detachment” (B3.13:2). Though we do not know how Showeram exactly understood the term יהודי it is clear that for him this term needs no further localization – in contrast to ארמי which is still just an ethnic term needing the additional information where the person dwells. Obviously, for such a non-Judean scribe from Syene of the year 402 a יהודי is in any case one who lives on Elephantine – a fact which earlier was not obvious for scribes from Syene. Thus, e.g., in B2.2:3 (464) and B2.4:1–2 (460) יב (בבירת) זי is still used in apposition to יהודי.

It results from this that the term יהודי got a new meaning around 420 BC, which obviously connects it closely with the Yaho cult on Elephantine. Consequently, for people outside Elephantine, a יהודי is naturally to be looked for on Elephantine, so that the place specification can be omitted here. For the scribes on Elephantine, however, the term יהודי is manifestly no longer a simple ethnic indication, but defines him as a member of the חילא יהודיא as a recognized cultic community in the realm of the Persian military in southern Egypt. Accordingly, when referring to membership in a particular Persian command unit, the term is avoided and replaced by ארמי. If, however, one means decidedly the members of the Yaho cult community, then, like in the letter to Bagohi, B4.7 and 8, they are now referred to simply as יהודיא.⁵²

⁵² Of course, the different uses of יהודי and ארמי even with the same persons had puzzled scholars for long time and different explanation had been offered, cf. e.g. Becking, *Identity in Persian Egypt*, 18–20; id., *Identity of the People*, and the literature mentioned there. But the earlier attempts suffer from the lack of a thorough categorization of the instances according to time and the different scribes and their background at the time they wrote a certain document. Thus, it had not been taken into account that even one and the same scribe may change his habit for diachronic reasons. For an exception compare van der Toorn, “Ethnicity at Elephantine,” and

The fact that this shift in meaning coincides with

- the establishment of the name of the Jaho community as חילא יהודיא,
- the appearance of Hananiah, who wrote the famous so-called Passover letter to the חילא יהודיא in 419 but was probably in contact with it earlier,
- and the adoption of the term אלה שמיא “god of heaven”

is certainly no coincidence. Rather, it may be assumed that around 420 the status of the Jaho community had fundamentally changed to the point that it had now evidently acquired a recognized position as a cult community in the context of the Achaemenid ruling structure. This is shown not only by the term חילא יהודיא with its military component חיל, but also by the observation that with אלה שמיא the Yaho community had taken over a designation of Jaho that was actually foreign to it and that also arose at the same time in Judah.

The well-known statement of Mauziah that the Chnum priests were opposed to the Judeans since the appearance of Hananiah (A4.3:7) confirms, on the one hand, that this change of status was carried out by the official Hananiah at Elephantine, and on the other hand, that it was not insignificant. However, it is a well-known, though unpleasant, phenomenon that indigenous religious groups are allergic to the social advancement of immigrant groups and their religious communities. Von Pilgrims’ attempt to place the ultimate responsibility for the Chum priests’ action against the Jaho-temple on the Jaho community to the effect that it was the result of a building code violation has proven untenable both archaeologically and in terms of legal history.⁵³ Thus, the devastation of the temple may have been a consequence of the agitation of the Chnum priests against the Jaho community, whose change of the social status the Chnum priests did not want to accept.

To sum up: the consolidation of the Jaho community with a temple on Elephantine must be dated to the time of Amasis at the latest, but may well have even older antecedents. The spelling יהה and the use of the Hebrew word צבאת show that this community conservatively adhered to its traditions brought from Judah and/or Israel into the Persian period.

However, the later adoption of the Aramaic orthography יהו for the name of Jaho as well as the disappearance of the designation צבאת, which probably was replaced by מרא השמיא, which become visible at the latest around 450 BC, show that the younger generations modernized their tradition step by step.

van der Toorn, *Becoming Diaspora Jews*, 116–143, who, nevertheless, underestimates the diachronic aspect of the use of the single terms.

⁵³ See above.

A decisive break in the history of the Yaho community on Elephantine was apparently their establishment as the חילא יהודיא around 420, possibly initiated by the Achaemenid side itself, or at least actively supported, which brought this community not only a new terminology but also garnered the hatred of the Chnum priests. It also caused a shift in meaning of יהודיא which turned from being used as a simple ethnic term to designate now the members of the Jaho community.

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