

James D. Moore

# Administering Cult at Elephantine

Shaul Shaked's work models the very best of the historical investigation of religion. With expertise and integrity he demonstrated how to use textual evidence to reconstruct history and religious phenomena, and I am honored to contribute this paper to a collection dedicated to the memory of his scholarship.

## Introduction

This contribution aims to provide a different perspective on references to notions of cult in the Aramaic documents from Persian period Elephantine by viewing them through the lens of the scribal cultural perspective of the administrators who wrote the documents. This perspective holds the following presuppositions: (1) the writers of the Elephantine Aramaic documents were foremost administrators rather than authors of literary compositions, such as biblical writers who encoded religious ideology into narrative. (2) The Yahô temple at Elephantine was a community and economic center. (3) In this sense, the temple's personnel reciprocally built and maintained cultural cohesion among the Judean community (i.e., "troop," Aram. *HYL*). (4) This culture was not a systemized religion but rather involved cultic activity designed to maintain order within the community's economy and to promote self-governance within the scope of imperial allowances. (5) The temple of Yahô was a center for the diffusion of Persian imperial culture in southern Egypt, and therefore, its economic and cultic agendas ensured that the Judean community was in right standing with the Persian administration in Egypt and by extension within the empire more broadly.

These presuppositions are an outgrowth of a forthcoming history of Elephantine within its imperial and administrative context.<sup>1</sup> That work argues that the Judeans at Elephantine and Syene were not mercenaries, but rather an imperial colony of Persian loyalists. This is based on the fact that no surviving document

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<sup>1</sup> This contribution is an outgrowth of the forthcoming study. Both are funded in part by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft grant "Judeans/Arameans at Elephantine: Their Social and Economic Status in Light of New Persian Period Texts from Egypt and Babylonia" (Project Number 432563380; active 2019–2024), hosted at the Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, Theological Faculty, under the Lehrstuhl of Bernd U. Schipper.

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**James D. Moore**, Ohio State University, USA

from the site describes (or alludes to) Judeans as a community involved in military action nor as controllers for imperial taxation of imports or exports at Elephantine or Syene. As of now (after six decades of excavations), no archaeological evidence of Persian period military weaponry survives from the site of Elephantine, and women were active in taxation, property ownership, and business, as full members of the various social “ranks” (DGL-unit and century-unit) of state dependency within the community (HYL). Terms referring to ranks of state dependency and communities have long been mistakenly thought to be military terminology.

Furthermore, recent advances in ancient Near Eastern studies have shown that temples in the Persian period were foremost economic centers overseen by Persians or Persian loyalists. If religious textual production occurred it was a marginal enterprise, likely driven by historically contextual circumstances. This knowledge is heuristically important for understanding the Yahô temple’s administration at Elephantine. The data from the Ebabbar temple at Sippar is an example of a Persian period major temple archive in a provincial district that was overseen by the regional (and subsequently imperial) administration.<sup>2</sup> Excavated there were two cuneiform archives which were operational until the beginning of the reign of Xerxes.<sup>3</sup> The major archive (Sippar 1; room 55) contained at least 60,000–70,000 tablets, all pertaining to the economic activities of the temple, its lands, labor, and royal interactions. Across the temple’s complex was found a much smaller archive (Sippar 2; room 351) described as a “temple library,” which comprised approximately 800 tablets of mostly literary content. From the available published data, the religious literary texts are part of the Mesopotamian canon known from earlier Standard Babylonian texts in addition to (traditional) royal inscriptions. Of the known genres, the only literary advances may be in the

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<sup>2</sup> The *qīpu* served as the senior royal representative in the major Babylonian temples in the Neo-Babylonian period. This role worked closely with the *šatammu*, the priestly temple administrator, who operated an independent administration. This Neo-Babylonian system was taken over and expanded by the Persians, at least at the Ezida temple in Borsippa, where the Persians began to claim eminent domain of temple lands. The *qīpu*’s role was expanded to control and directly oversee the organization of state labor of dependents within the temple economy/administration (Kleber, “Taxation and Fiscal Administration,” 70–71). This destroyed the notion of autonomy previously held by the Neo-Babylonian temple administrators. Similar situations are found at Elephantine in the reign of Darius according to the so-called Pharendates correspondences, which demonstrate provincial approval was needed for the election of the *lesonis*-priest of the temple of Khnum (Pap. Ber. P. 13540). Such activity appears to have also been in place at the temple of Amun in Karnak (Pap. Louvre E 7128).

<sup>3</sup> For possible reasons as to why the archive ends at this point see MacGinnis, “The Use of Writing Boards.”

genre of “pseudo-biographical works.”<sup>4</sup> From the current state of the archive, it seems that priests of the Ebabbar temple at Sippar were not engaged in the formation of organized religion, but rather in the practice of understanding the traditional religious culture of Babylonia and its interaction with royal propaganda in order to maintain the temple’s economic interests. The archives of Sippar (and other major temple sites in the Persian provinces of Mesopotamia and Egypt) are heuristically valuable for framing how cult was administered at Elephantine given the surviving Aramaic evidence from the Persian period.

It must further be remembered that all but two Aramaic textual objects from Elephantine are documentary textual sources. The two literary texts (the Story of Ahiqar and the Darius Inscription) are not of Judean origin and do not speak directly to practices of the Judean cult nor a notion of Judean religion. Scholarship has focused disproportionately on these sources. Therefore, it will be shown in this study that when the references to the Judean cult that do survive are interpreted from the perspective of administrative scribal culture and with a sensitivity to the documents’ various administrative genres, new historical interpretations are fleshed out. Although references to cult are few, this study does not aim to be comprehensive. Instead, it will focus on a collection of texts dating to the fifth year of Darius II (419 BCE), discuss facets of the temple’s services offered to its own community and the state administration, and end with a discussion of cultic days and festivals.

As a caveat, for this study I will forego an in-depth discussion of the copies of Yedanyah’s letter to Bagavahya the Governor of Judah (Pap. Ber. P. 13495 = TAD A4.7 || Pap. Cairo EM JdE 43465 = TAD A4.8), which are generally the central texts studied for information about the religion and cult of Elephantine. The letter’s charged emotive language is designed to elicit political sway from Bagavahya to effect change in the Egyptian province that would result in the Persian provincial administration of Egypt approving, financing, and rebuilding the Yahô temple at Elephantine. The letter provides (1) important architectural information in its report of the damage made to the temple and the cultic accoutrement therein; (2) references to mourning attire, mourning rites, and the act of fasting, (3) and shows that meal-offerings (Aram. MNĦH), burnt animal offerings (Aram. ṬWH), and sacrifices (Aram. DBH) were, at least, occasionally performed in the temple. Other than this, it is a political and cultural letter, that was written out of political necessity because the responsible Persian administrators had gone rouge by favoring the native Egyptian population over the Judean Persian loyalists in a dispute between their cultural centers at Elephantine.

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4 Pedersén, *Archives and Libraries*, 194–197.

## Documents from the Fifth Year of Darius II (419 BCE)

The so-called Passover Letter has been at the center of the discussion of Judean festivals since its publication because it deals with instructions from someone named Ḥananyah to the priest Yedanyah at Elephantine regarding activity within a particular week of the month of Nisan. In recent years some, particularly Reinhard Kratz and Bernd Schipper, have focused on the role of Ḥananyah, the letter's sender, in the Judean community often equating him to an instigator of cultural conflict found in another letter (TADAE A4.3).<sup>5</sup> When we view the letter of Ḥananyah through the lens of the imperial administration, different concerns come into view. These issues are important to work out for understanding the history of the community, however, the question remains: what is the *purpose* of the letter?<sup>6</sup>

A conservative translation of the fragmentary text is:

### The Letter of Ḥananyah, Pap. Ber. P. 13464 = TAD A4.1

- r 1. [To my brothers Ye]ʿdanyaʿh and his ʿcolleaʿgues, [the] Judean comm[unity,] your brother Ḥanan[y]ah. May God/the gods [seek after] the welfare of my brothers
- r 2. [at all times.] And now, this year, year 5 of Darius the King, (word) has been sent from the king to ʿArša[ma ...]
- r 3. [... ...] • Yʿ. Now, you (m.p.), thus, appoint/count ʿ{D|R}{B|D|R}[... ...]
- r 4. [... ...]{D|R}W. And from day 15 until day 21 of[ Nisan ...]
- r 5. [... ...] they were/be (m.p.) pure/clean. And beware! Labor ʿ[... ...]
- r 6. [... ...] you (m.p.) must ʿnoʿt drink(.) and anything that is leavened/fermented ʿʿSʿ[... ...]
- v 1. [... from day 15 (...), at ]sunset until day 21 of Nisa[n ...]
- v 2. [... b]ring into your (m.p.) chambers and seal (them) during ʿtʿ[these] days.
- v 3. [... ...]Yʿ
- v 4. [To] my brothers Yedanyah and his colleagues, the Judean community, your brother Ḥananyah ʿsʿ[on of PN].

After the opening salutation, the letter's initial instruction begins after the topical marker "now" (Aram. KʿT). The clause indicates that in Darius's fifth year instruction was sent from the imperial bureau to the provincial bureau of ʿAršama,

<sup>5</sup> Schipper, "The Judeans/Arameans of Elephantine," esp. 216–223 and Kratz, "Judean Ambassadors."

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed analysis of this letter, see Barnea, "P. Berlin 13464, Yahwism and Achaemenid Zoroastrianism at Elephantine" in this volume.

whose official title known from other documents was “the prince.”<sup>7</sup> The details of that content are either lost in the lacuna of Ḥananyah’s letter or perhaps more likely already known by Yedanyah at Elephantine. It should be remembered that a remarkable feature of the Aramaic imperial administration was its hierarchical structure that allowed provincial decisions to be made within the province with minimal imperial interference.<sup>8</sup> In fact, Ḥananyah’s statement is the only surviving evidence that the imperial administration could affect Elephantine.

The rarity of imperial involvement means that most certainly the content of Darius’s message to ʾAršama had nothing to do with Judean festivals or the Judean temple. The dissemination of the imperial instruction would have been sent to ʾAršama’s bureau, which in turn would have made all districts aware of the message. Ḥananyah’s letter is not meant to make Yedanyah aware of the imperial instruction, but to advise Yedanyah and the Judean community in light of the imperial instruction. This can be said to be the letter’s ultimate purpose.

But what is the empire concerned with in the month of Nisan that would ultimately affect the Judean community? Idan Dershowitz believes it refers to a correction of the calendar due to an intercalated Adar in Darius’s fifth year and restores the text as such.<sup>9</sup> His view can be rejected since it does not account for known administrative procedure<sup>10</sup> or known features of Persian period scribal training,<sup>11</sup> nor does it appear to be chronologically

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7 ʾAršama is never identified as a “satrap” in the surviving Aramaic sources. See discussion in Moore, “Who Gave You a Decree,” esp. 74–76.

8 Moore, “Persian Administrative Process,” esp. 51 n. 10 and Moore, “Who Gave You a Decree,” 75.

9 Dershowitz, “The Elephantine Passover Papyrus.”

10 See note 8 above.

11 The Babylonian calendar was standardized before Persian imperial ambitions. The standardized calendar with its eight or nineteen year cycle was adopted by the reign of Darius II, and the king’s authority is lacking on early Persian period texts referring to intercalated months; see Steele, “Making Sense of Time,” 475–477. The minor discrepancies in Elephantine documents observed by Stern, “The Babylonian Calendar at Elephantine,” esp. table 1 (pp. 162–163) and table 2 (p. 165) are in all but one instance, a discrepancy of a one or two days with the exception being four days. These can be explained as errors owed to miscalculating when synchronizing with the Egyptian calendar. As for TAD B2.3, B2.4, and B3.9, Stern concludes that the contracts are off by one month due to not intercalating a second Adar. Of the two similar texts drafted on the same day TAD B2.3 and B2.4, Stern overlooks that the former exhibits a scribal correction on the date in which a numeral “20” was added between the numeral and the Egyptian month; “day 21 of Kislev, that is, day 1 of Mesore” was corrected to “day 21 of Kislev, that is, day 21 of Mesore,” eliminating the word-break. The second manuscript’s line containing the date is broken, but even still TAD postulates a correction to the lost text based on spacing and remnants of

viable.<sup>12</sup> Instead, one may reasonably assume that during Nisan, the first month of the year, the empire's concern focused on taxation and/or audits of the inventories of storehouse goods. This is further supported by the letter's content which refers to storing and sealing items (v 2).<sup>13</sup> This type of imperial concern was cause for Hananyah to provide advice to Yedanyah regarding matters of the Yahô temple, since it was the primary storehouse and likely taxation center for the Judean and affiliated communities in Syene/Elephantine. Evidence for this comes from the administrative documents written in the same year, only months later, which demonstrate that the Yahô temple collected taxes from the Judean community; that a major Syenean ration distribution occurred in the same year and was accompanied by storehouse audits throughout Upper Egypt; and that likely a census and taxation of taxable Egyptian families occurred at the same time.

The Yahô Temple's Collection List (TAD C3.15), is by far, the most cited administrative papyrus from Elephantine. It is worth noting that of the list's 128 names only 8 possible correspondences can be found when compared to the other documents. It represents a large group of Judeans whom we know nothing about and a population that is likely too large to be living solely on the island. It is, I believe, an example of a community collection in anticipation of the royal tax (likely a *mandattu*-tax, Aram. MNDH) owed on the community lands.

The temple functions as an intermediary between the state and the Judean and affiliated communities of colonists. The Yahô Temple's Collection List states only that the money was collected on "the 3rd of Phamenoth, year 5" (r 1) without an eponym. Arthur Cowley<sup>14</sup> and others dated the list to 419 BCE during the reign

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stokes. Porten, "Calendar of Aramaic Texts," esp. 24, rightly observed that 21 days into Marcheshvan, the writer was thinking of Kislev and wrote that instead. In further support of Porten's argument, I would add that the notary was likely referencing a formulaic manual while at the same time reading TAD B2.2 (cited in B2.3:23–27), which was written in the Babylonian month of Kislev – the same month erroneously appearing in B2.3 and B2.4. The notary wrote Kislev in B2.3 then it was copied into B2.4. The notary's error in TAD B3.9 is not as apparent. But if I am understanding the data correctly, Darius II's eighth regnal year (c. 416 BCE) would have included a second Adar, but the misdated document B3.9 comes 5 months earlier than the first Adar of that year. Porten, "Calendar of Aramaic Texts," 23 opted to see the monthly error owed to a miscalculation of the Egyptian month, and this seems to be the obvious answer.

<sup>12</sup> The letter appears to have been written in the first two weeks of Darius II's fifth year, before the 15th of Nisan, which is the start of the range of time cited in the letter. The 15th of Nisan has no pragmatic bearing on intercalation, which would still be over twelve months away.

<sup>13</sup> The word for "chamber" (Aram. TWN) refers to an enclosed room without windows; see CAL "twn."

<sup>14</sup> Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri*, 65.

of Darius II and rightly suggested a connection with Ḥananyah's letter.<sup>15</sup> Porten argued on paleographic and onomastic grounds that the fifth year of Amytraeus in 400 BCE is meant and that the collection may have been in preparation of the Feast of Weeks.<sup>16</sup> He also postulates that the lack of the king's name may be "further confirmation of the unofficial character of the document."<sup>17</sup> Others have discussed at length the end of the account which provides a statement regarding the deities Yahô, Anathbethel, and Eshembethel.<sup>18</sup> While the collection of the gods were part of the same administrative activity, it does not necessarily mean that these deities occupied the same temple. Only Yahô and Anatyahô (TAD B7.3:3) are referred to as Northwest Semitic deities at Elephantine. Moreover, Bethel and the Queen of Heaven, presumably Bethel's consort Anathbethel,<sup>19</sup> were worshiped in a temple at Syene according to a Hermopolis letter (TAD A2.1). Recognizing this, Karel van der Toorn writes of the gods in the Yahô Temple's Collection List, "One would have expected to find Anat-Bethel and Eshem-Bethel on the[ other] side of the river."<sup>20</sup> There is no administrative reason to assume that they were not. The deity Eshem remains somewhat elusive as is clear in Bob Becking's recent review of the evidence.<sup>21</sup> Others have noted that Eshem-type names can be found in the corpus, but as far as I can tell they have overlooked the fact that Eshem-type names (in addition to Bethel-type and Ḥerem-type names) appear as witnesses on a contract that was written by a scribe who identified the region as Syene, not Elephantine (TAD B3.9). There is no reason to assume from an administrative perspective that the collection events recorded in the document occurred at Elephantine rather than among Judean lands off the island, where affiliated Persian approved communities also resided.

As I have argued elsewhere, using paleography to date fifth century Aramaic sources is dubious.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, I, unlike Porten, believe that the Collection

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15 Grelot, *Documents araméens d'Égypte*, 366 rejected Porten's dating for similar reasons: "Dans les deux cas, la date est donc proche de la fête des Semaines. On peut donc déjà supposer que la proximité de la Pentecôte a fourni l'occasion de cette quête pour le 'denier du culte.' Mais plusieurs raisons plaident en faveur de l'année 419, si l'on veut expliquer cette attestation claire d'un Judaïsme non réformé. Le 'Papyrus pascal,' antérieur à la Pâque de 418 (n° 96), constitue un indice de réforme qui rend peu probable la persistance d'un tel état de choses dans les dernières années du siècle."

16 Porten, *Archives from Elephantine*, 160–164.

17 Porten, *Archives from Elephantine*, 164.

18 For a recent discussion see Barnea, "Interpretatio Ivdaica."

19 See van der Toorn, *Becoming Diaspora Jews*, 33 and references therein.

20 Toorn, *Becoming Diaspora Jews*, 34.

21 Becking, *Identity in Persian Egypt*, 47–48.

22 NAP, pp. 219–221.

List is an official account. The data show that state accountants did not need to use royal eponyms in dates on taxation documents or storehouse audits, as indicated by the Syene Ration List's summary of storehouse goods as well as administrative documents from Saqqara.<sup>23</sup>

The Syene Ration List (NAP no. 2.2.3 and TAD C3.14) is an excellent example of an official account which refers to state activity at Syene in a document found at Elephantine. It includes summaries of total storehouse expenditures from the month of Mehir in year four through Mehir year five from the districts of Thebes to Syene. Preceding these audits of the storehouse expenditures is a list of ration distributions to fifty-four persons, who are called members of the Syenean Troop (Aram. ḤYL' SWNKNY', r iv 1). Both the reference to district storehouses and to Syeneans are a sign that the document refers to those performing their service obligation in the active labor team or military units of the Syenean district. The document represents an annual accounting or audit of the storehouses in Darius's fifth year and, therefore, may be seen as a (by)product of the imperial order sent to Aršama's bureau, which was referred to at the beginning of Ḥananyah's letter.

Similar to the Yahô Temple's Collection List is a fragmentary account that recent research in the form of new readings and newly published fragments has shown to be a tax collection on the taxable Egyptian population at Elephantine (NAP no. 2.2.1).<sup>24</sup> It is enticing to see the document connected to the wave of taxation and storehouse auditing that the Judeans and the Syenean troop experienced in Darius's fifth year. Like the Syene Ration List, there is no indication that the Judean community participated in writing the document. In this case the document is solely concerned with Egyptian family units and may be the prerogative of the Khnum temple's administration and the Persian authorities who oversaw it. Thus, the administrative backdrop of the taxation and auditing event in Darius's fifth year can be used to better understand the Yahô Temple's Collection List. The collection need not have occurred at Elephantine but may be part of the temple's role in collecting community taxes in the farmlands off the island. The temple likely sent representatives to collect community taxes among its farmland inhabitants, which explains why so few of the names are known in the other documentation.<sup>25</sup>

Now having broadened the historical picture of the administrative context of Darius's fifth year, Ḥananyah's letter is understood in a new light. His instructions

<sup>23</sup> Here I also include the accounts on the palimpsest of the Ahiqar Manuscript (TAD C1.1 and C3.7), which refer to only years ten and eleven, without an eponym.

<sup>24</sup> Formerly TAD C3.9.

<sup>25</sup> This model of tax collection appears on a solely civil-level among the Persian period Judean community at al-Yahudu under the auspice of the Judean *dēkū*. See Wunsch, *Judaean by the Waters of Babylon*, 55–56 and Zadok, "Yamu-Iziri the Summoner of Yahūdu."

to Yedanyah at Elephantine seem less likely to refer to a matter of timing regarding festivals in the week of Nisan, as most have previously argued, but rather to the temple's ability to finance and provide the resources for such festivals in view of the year's upcoming taxation and auditing. On this point, it should be remembered that the impetus for seasonal festivals was the careful administration of food and storage. The letter's prohibition on drinking and possible reference to leavened or fermented goods could refer to a conservation of resources (r 6).<sup>26</sup> This is further supported by the statement regarding the sealing and storage of goods (v 2). The letter may simply be a warning (r 5) to not over indulge in the upcoming festival and to (surreptitiously ?) store away resources in view of the coming tax and audit.<sup>27</sup> Religious or cultic festival activity was often merely the cultural and administrative expression of taxation.

Only after establishing the purpose of the letter in view of the historically accurate administrative practices, can one speculate about the festival to which Ḥananyah refers. It is possible that the festival was not mentioned in the letter. While Passover was practiced at Elephantine (see below), there is no evidence it is connected with a temple service. So while the dates mentioned align with the biblical Feast of Weeks, it is not clear that that festival was celebrated among Judeans at Elephantine. It should be remembered that a variety of festivals may have been held in the first month of the year, including Iranian festivals.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps it is historically irresponsible to even speculate what festival may have been referred to here, but if I were to hazard a guess, I would tentatively suggest the letter refers to the wide-spread Near Eastern/Mediterranean festival held in the month of Nisan associated with taxation, the Marzeah (see below) because it is the only festival mentioned (so far) in the Aramaic sources from Elephantine that is associated with temple activities. Nonetheless, the point to be made is that the Letter of Ḥananyah demonstrates an intimate relationship between the priestly functions of the temple of Yahô and the Persian taxation and rationing scheme. The documents indicate that cultic activity exists within the limitations of civil allowances for the Judean community of state dependents.

26 The end of line r 6 may be restored as an imperative, "anything that is leavened pa'ck' [age up!] (Aram. 'S' [RW])."

27 As for the fragmentary statement regarding purity (Aram. DKYN), note that in the ostraca terms that are typically associated with numinous (im)purity by biblical scholars are used pragmatically to refer to an item's quality (e.g., CG nos. 97; 125; 137). See discussion in Lemaire, "Judean Identity in Elephantine," 371 and Lemaire, "The Ostraca of Elephantine," 48.

28 Barnea, "P. Berlin 13464," in this volume.

## Some Historical Remarks on the Temple's Services

As the evidence from Darius II's fifth year demonstrates, the Yahô temple was two-facing. On the one hand, it was the community and economic center of the Judean and affiliated communities at Elephantine and Syene. On the other hand, it was a provincial and imperial vehicle for extracting taxes from those communities. In this section I will discuss one of the resources that the temple offered which extended into the civil judiciary followed by observations about sacrifices and offerings.

### Oath Statements

The civil administration recognized the role of the temples, which extended into the domain of civil law by providing a venue in which state recognized oath statements could be made in lieu of evidential documentation. The papyri contracts are the most often studied legal documents<sup>29</sup> from Elephantine. Contracts are highly formulaic and deal with civil matters of the state, not matters of religion or cult. That said, in legal disputes the state could request that an oath be made in lieu of documentary evidence. Oaths or references to oaths made before Yahô (TAD B2.2; B2.3; B7.1), Anatyahô (B7.3), and Sati (B2.8) can be found in the sources. Beyond these explicit references one finds an allusion to the oath making practice in one of the fragmentary ostraca missives. CG no. 265 refers to some sort of reed construction (Aram. ḤṢṢ, line cc 1) and an associated box. The text clearly states that "the documents are not in my box" (cc 4). After a statement concerning one named Malkyah and a karš (presumably of silver), the text insists, "And if Ma'ûzyah did not swear [...] for/to Tat'ay, he must swear it [...] Malkyah send/sent" (cv 4–6).<sup>30</sup> It is probable that here we have a discussion of missing documentary evidence for which an oath statement must be made to quell a

<sup>29</sup> In Mesopotamia, the Persians elevated registries and other administrative texts to the level of "legal" documentation, so much so that these administrative sources were consulted in court cases and trumped contractual evidence; see Stolper, *Entrepreneurs and Empire*, 29–31. This is also true of the Aramaic sources from Egypt, but unfortunately, most of the higher-level administrative documents that may be deemed "legal" survive only from Saqqara.

<sup>30</sup> Additionally, in DAIK/SI O 5018, Fund-Nr. 45200 (unpub.), swearing may be meant in the context of silver; see discussion in Moore, "Aramaic Ostraca."

dispute. Beyond this missive and the references to oaths in contracts, two examples of actual oath statements survive.

The first TAD B7.3 is a nearly complete Aramaic oath statement that was claimed to have been made in a chapel (Aram. MSGD<sup>7</sup>) and before Anatyahô; this is presumably a designated area in the Yahô temple's complex. The writer of the document is not stated. It is possible that the notary of the court followed the oath-maker into the sacred complex to write the document, but as evidence from the next document will show, it is more likely that a priest or temple oblate recorded the legal condition that the oath-maker was compelled to swear.<sup>31</sup> This is a very important social-historical observation because it demonstrates a relationship between the administrative scribal training of the advanced notary, who could write contracts and trail records for the state, and the training of at least one administrative personnel in the temple complex.

The second source, TAD B7.4, is a small fragment which contains an Aramaic docket indicating it is an oath statement. The recto however, is written in Demotic and preserves the end of the oath's first eight lines. Until recently, this text has evaded translation, even though the photograph was published in Sachau's 1911 volume for which Wilhelm Spiegelberg gave comments without translation. Jan Moje claims to have read a few words in the document, including the eponym Artaxerxes in the first line.<sup>32</sup> The next five lines are too difficult to decipher, but Moje restores lines 6–8 with a stock legal phrase. The last lacuna ends in a male's name, according to Moje, then he sees the female's name Meritptah.<sup>33</sup> If the reading is correct, it is enticing to see this as the oath statement of Mib/ptahyah,<sup>34</sup> which she made in the Sati temple to dispel the suit which the Egyptian Pîa' son of Paḥî brought against her in TAD B2.8. Regardless, it is certain from this Demotic/Aramaic oath statement that an Egyptian temple administrator, perhaps Ḥmny • ... who is indicated on the Aramaic docket, recorded the oath in a temple, and by comparison we can assume the same was true of the Aramaic oath (B7.3).

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31 I do not rule out the possibility that this notary was a priest serving his *ilku*/HLK-service obligation and, therefore, was the same person as the administrative priest. The point is that the state judicial and cultic administrative roles were distinct though in theory they could be held for a time by the same person (see below).

32 Moje, "References to Persians and Judeans."

33 The name itself is highly unusual and may be foreign.

34 If Mibṭahyah's name was Egyptian-ized, this may explain why some writers spell the name with /p/ rather than /b/. Furthermore, in TAD B2.3:36 on the address of one of her contracts, she is called Mibṭah, which is phonetically close to Meritptah, for which the -rit- may not have been pronounced. This Egyptian-ization added to her social advantage as a businesswoman on the island.



**CG no. 175 + 185 = HL no. J8<sup>36</sup>**

- cc 1. [...] °  
 cc 2. [...] I stayed the night  
 cc 3. [... t]od'a'y  
 cc 4. [...] so]n of Yedanyah  
 cc 5. [...]’ 10 (...)  
 cc 6. [...] daugh]ter of Saraka  
 cc 7. [...] 'by the li'fe of Yahô  
 cc 8. [...] {N|K} on top of  
 cc 9. [...] (the) [d]a'y which I shall die,  
 cc 10. may Yahô of Hosts carry you (f.s.)  
 cc 11. Setaryah is pardoned  
 cc 12. Each woman is pardoned.  
 cc 13. –  
 cv 1. That/who(m) '{'|Y}N'[...]  
 cv 2. you (f.s.) ma[d]e[ ...]  
 cv 3. to your (f.s.) heart TM[...]  
 cv 4. [st]omach pain[ ...]  
 cv 5. and I said to you[ ...]  
 cv 6. Now, if B[...]  
 cv 7. Now, until he comes to you (f.s.), Yahô  
 cv 8. do not approach!

I tentatively hold that the text refers to Judean women who may have been charged with illicit sexual activity. They were granted the cultic pardon of expiation – probably by paying for it – but are warned to refrain from cultic interaction if either a child was conceived as a result the offense (cv 4) or if the event happens again (cv 7–8). While I am filling many gaps to draw this conclusion, the fact that two women are pardoned within a cultic context is clear. What is also clear from historical evidence is that the pardon would have been costly.

In no ancient Near Eastern Semitic context did priests regularly offer a temple's service free of charge. Perhaps the most relevant historical evidence for understanding this pardon at Elephantine comes from the Carthaginian Marseille Tariff Text (KAI 69) because it comes from a nearly contemporary Semitic and Mediterranean temple context.<sup>37</sup> It describes the taxes owed to a Phoenician/Punic temple of Baalšapon and the distribution of those taxes in the event of sin as well as how one can bring either an animal for sacrifice or make a monetary payment equivalent to the price of the animal.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> I have collated and translated all ostraca in this contribution.

<sup>37</sup> I date the inscription to the 4th century BCE.

<sup>38</sup> I do not take the biblical reference to the Hebrew root KPR to be reliable historical information in this regard, even though nearly all occurrences appear in the so-called priestly source, which scholars generally date to the Persian period. That said, HL no. J8 and the Carthaginian

At Elephantine, in addition to HL no. J8 we find CG no. X8 which appears to be a reference to another sin against the community. In this case perhaps slander or libel between two members of the community is in view. This community matter brings cultic guilt, which needs to be adjudicated and expiation performed for the guilty party/parties. The text reads:

**CG no. X8**

- cc 1. [...] ° [...]
- cc 2. [ ° ( ° ) ] ° [ ° ] son of Tmyl'. Now,
- cc 3. [...] 'H'R'. Indeed, to Yislah
- cc 4. [...] ° T a word which you/I/she spoke
- cc 5. [...] ° M and it was not. Moreover,
- cc 6. that (word ?) (f.s.) shall be so.
- cv 1. 'And they shall say,<sup>1</sup> it/she (f.s.) pardoned us / expiation is ours ([...]).
- cv 2. Indeed, I am he, a si'nn'er
- cv 3. who be'lo'ngs to them. (4) No (3) man
- cv 4. shall sin against Yahō
- cv 5. We have feared him. Now,
- cv 6. [ ° ° ] ° them, but not Y[ ° ( ° ) ° ]
- cv 7. [...] my 'b'oat [ ° ° ° ]

These two Elephantine ostraca indicate that the temple served a judicial function within the Judean community whereby it dealt with community and cultural offenses that were outside the domain of the state. By comparison with known Semitic and Mediterranean practices it can be determined that the offenses cost the offenders a monetary price to regain right stand within the community. It should further be noted that HL no. J8 and probably the content of CG no. X8 refer to issues that would not have been tried in the Persian imperial judicial system because they dealt with internal cultural matters rather than matters of imperial property, the property of imperial personnel, or the legal (and taxable) status of humans. In both cases, these texts survive likely because the administrators are concerned with tracking the money paid for the expiation rite or tracking the resolution of the conflict. Whether these are temple records or descriptive receipts issued to the offenders who paid for pardoning is unknown.

## TAD A4.9 and A4.10

Given the importance of sacrifice within the Judean community, this study's administrative perspective contributes to arguments regarding the history of the

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Marseille Tariff Text (KAI 69), could be used to understand how in Leviticus 5, an offender could pay in monetary terms for their offense. For further discussion of the Mediterranean and tariff context of Leviticus see Darshan, "The Casuistic Law."

right to make animal sacrifices in the Judean temple. For several reasons beyond restoring offenders to the community, Semitic temples provided their patrons services in the form of sacrificing and offering. As could be the case in the Letter of Ḥananyah, temples were responsible for providing a venue for festivals, which included sacrifices and/or offerings. Taxation collected by the temple, even if it was funneled to the state, was a form of offering. As is clear from a reference in Yedanyah's Letter to Bagavahya (TAD A4.7 || A4.8), the temple also extends the service of offerings and sacrifices "in the name of" someone in order to advance their fortunes psychologically and socially (A4.7:25–26).

A couple of documents, which Porten edited as "letters" and included in the so-called Jedaniah Archive (which is better understood as the Yedanyah Dossier) have been interpreted to be acknowledgments by either the Judeans or the Persians that if the Yahô temple, which was damaged by a coalition of Egyptian priests and rouge Persian officials, were to be rebuilt, then blood sacrifices would no longer be practiced therein. One of the two texts often cited as evidence that the rebuilt temple of Yahô would abstain from blood sacrifice is TAD A4.9. The document is a memorandum-entry (or better two memorandum-entries in one) – not a letter, and the conclusions scholars have drawn from the document are the result of a fundamental misunderstanding of the administrative genre of memorandum-entries.

The memorandum-entry (Aram. DKRN or ZKRN) is an emic administrative genre that was taught across the empire to Aramaic administrators and used throughout the duration of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. In a forthcoming study on all known attestations of the term,<sup>39</sup> I show that memorandum-entries are *précis* of official legal documents, from decrees to tax ledgers. All attestations can be linked to storehouse management, often in the domains of storage, tax collection, or the issuing of food rations. While each *précis* may include a few phrases copied from the actual document, the language of memorandum-entries remains terse, often in note form. This is perhaps because Persians elevated the function of "official" state documentation (see note 29), and therefore, it was likely inappropriate, if not legally dangerous, to possess exact or near exact copies of official legal documents. The memorandum-entry served as an *aide-mémoire* for the administrator who wrote it. It was evidence that a legal document that affected his domain of work existed or said document permitted or required his institution to engage in the stipulations noted in the memorandum-entry.

The memorandum referring to the Yahô temple's offerings has been mined for its content, but its administrative function as a memorandum-entry has been

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39 Moore, "The Legality of Persian."

wholly overlooked. Scholars are correct to assume that TAD A4.9 demonstrates that the temple renovation was approved by the authorities, but the document itself is not “official” nor is it an indication that the approved project was ever undertaken. This is due in part to the fact that the damage caused by the Egyptian priests was repairable and did not disturb the building’s foundations.<sup>40</sup> In this vein, the cessation of offerings and animal sacrifices is likely owed to damaged altars (see note 51). Furthermore, the papyrus lacks reference to blood sacrifices, but this cannot be construed as meaning the Persians prohibited the renovated temple from performing sacrifices. The document reads:

**Pap. Ber. P. 13497 = TAD A4.9<sup>41</sup>**

Memorandum of Bagavahya and Delayah. They said  
to me: Memorandum. Quote: “It shall be to you in Egypt to say  
before ʾAršama: ‘Concerning the altar-house of the God of  
the Heavens which (was) built in Fort Elephantine—  
it was previously before Kanbûzî (i.e. Cambyses)  
(and it) which that wicked Vīdranga demolished.’  
(Dated) on the 14th (year) of Daryûhûš (i.e. Darius II), the king.  
(It shall be to you in Egypt) to (re)build it in its place, as it was formerly.  
And the grain-offerings and incense-offerings they may present on  
that altar, just as formerly  
had been done.”

When understood in view of the established administrative genre of memorandum-entries, and considered for its terse administrative language, the most obvious interpretation is that the document was a note made by a storehouse administrator, who was responsible for distributing grain and dried goods to the temple personnel for the grain-offerings. There is ample evidence both archaeological (here I refer to house *k* of the Rubensohn and Zucker excavations<sup>42</sup>) and documentary (e.g., TAD A4.5) that the administration surrounding the temple of Yahô included large grain stocks, which were managed by personnel who were not priests, such as ʾAḥuṭab the dry-goods storage manager referred to often in the ostraca missives. Therefore, the administrator who wrote this memorandum sim-

<sup>40</sup> According to von Pilgrim, there is currently no archaeological evidence of temple renovation at his proposed site for the Yahô Temple (“On the Archaeological Background,” 11). The formatting here is intentional. The third line has a correction in the margin, and the second line is an interlinear insertion.

<sup>41</sup> The transliteration is certain and agrees with TAD. The translation is my own. TAD indicates the composition’s erasures on lines 2–3, which I have left out for clarity. For two different proposals of the administrator’s compositional acts see Moore, “Who Gave You a Decree,” 81–86, esp. 84 and Porten, “Aramaic Papyri and Parchments,” esp. 98–101.

<sup>42</sup> Honroth, Rubensohn, and Zucker, “Bericht über die Ausgrabungen,” esp. 23–24, Taf. III.

ply summarized the parts of the official petition and decree that granted approval for the temple to continue grain offerings after its repair. Animal sacrifice was not a function of this administrator's domain and thus not mentioned in the document.

In a similar vein, it is important to study A4.10, which is a roster of backers, who support the rebuilding of the Yahô temple. It is formatted as a report, not a letter, and uses the terse administrative language of a memorandum-entry, though the administrative title DKRN is not mentioned. From an administrative point of view, the text may be understood as a petition, but if so, this is not an official petition, of which one survives from Elephantine,<sup>43</sup> but rather a draft in note form. The reconstruction of the papyrus by Sachau has essentially never been challenged,<sup>44</sup> and the document has been taken to mean that if the temple is rebuilt, the Judeans agree to omit burnt offerings from the temple's services.<sup>45</sup> As can be seen from the photograph, the document is difficult to read due to lacuna that affect the relevant lines (see Fig. 1).

TAD translates the relevant lines as:

[We 5 persons] say thus: If our lord [...] and our temple of YHW the God be rebuilt in Elephantine the fortress as it was former[ly bu]ilt – and sheep, ox, and goat are [n]ot made there as burnt-offering but [they offer there] (only) incense (and) meal-offering – and should our lord mak[e] a statement [about this, then] we shall give to the house of our lord si[lver ... and] a thousa[nd] ardabs of barley.

Grelot similarly renders:

[Nous 5 hommes] parlent ainsi : Si notre Seigneur le veut, le sanctuaire de Yahô notre Dieu sera construit à Éléphantine-la-forteresse comme il était construit auparavant, et il n'y sera pas fait d'holocauste de bœufs, bœufs (et) boucs, mais on offrira l'encensement (et ) l'oblation. Et que notre Seigneur fasse une enquête là-dessus; Quant à nous nous donnerons à la maison de notre Seigneur une somme de ... ainsi que de l'orge : mille ardabes.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Moore, "Persian Administrative Process."

<sup>44</sup> Sachau, *Aramäische Papyri*, 31–33.

<sup>45</sup> Porten, *Archives from Elephantine*, 291–292. Grelot, *Documents araméens d'Égypte*, 417 believes that the order to rebuild the temple had been issued, and this document is a receipt of the order. It seems unlikely that receipt of decrees were part of the imperial administration.

<sup>46</sup> Grelot, *Documents araméens d'Égypte*, 417–418 (no. 104).



Fig. 1: Photograph of Pap. Cairo EM JdE 43467 = TAD A4.10.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Photograph from Sachau, *Aramäische Papyrus und Ostraka*, Taf. 4. The publication, and photograph is in the public domain. Ruler added for scale by J. D. Moore.

The document records a proposal by Yedanyah and his colleagues that the five listed men would be willing to offer 'Aršama's bureau 1,000 ardabs of grain, if their temple be rebuilt. It should be made clear that they are not requesting permission to rebuild their temple using their own labor or financing, but rather that the state should rebuild the temple, and in return the community through these five men will pay a surcharge, a one-time tax to support the state's investment in the temple's repair.<sup>48</sup> The tax is enormous and can be estimated between 25,000–55,000 liters of barley, depending on how one calculates the size of an ardab.<sup>49</sup>

The reconstruction of the effaced text on lines 8–9 in TAD rightly matches the surviving strokes. The question then becomes how does one interpret lines 10–11? Clearly line 10 uses a conjunctive-*waw* indicating that it begins an independent clause. It may be the apodosis of the condition of petition beginning with “if” (Aram. HN) in line 7. In such a case, the *waw* can be translated as “then,” but it must be coordinated with LHN at the beginning of line 11, which is likely the preposition meaning “except for, but.” In addition to these matters, one must consider the restoration of the short word ending in *alef* in the middle of line 10. Sachau restored [L]’ “not,” and to my knowledge, no one has proposed an alternative. In fact, one may read here [L]’ but also [KL]’ or [H]’. The latter two options render the opposite meaning than what is traditionally thought.

Additionally, the Aramaic noun MQLW poses a problem because it is so far only attested here. The word is a loan from Akkadian *maqlû*,<sup>50</sup> where it refers most often to a ritual series by that name, but its etymological meaning is simply “burning” (CAD M1, 251–252 meaning 2).

Lastly, the clause's verb is singular. This means that the list of animals should be construed distributively or as a list of options translated with “or,” rather than as a compound series translated with “and.” In this sense, *maqlû* may be an appositive noun. Interestingly, Akkadian lexical texts indicate that *maqlû* may be construed as a place for burning, such as an “oven” or “grate” (CAD M1 251–252 “*maqlû*” and “*maqlûtu*”). Given the context of TAD A4.10, a specialized “place of burning” also produces a compelling reading. In addition to those traditional translations with the restored [L]’ “not”, the following alternatives should be seriously considered:

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48 This may be (akin to) the *iškaru*- or *urašu*-labor tax; see Kleber, “Taxation and Fiscal Administration in Babylonia,” 74–75 and Schütze, “The Aramaic Texts,” 418–419.

49 See recently Bivar, “Weights and Measures I.”

50 Kaufman, *Akkadian Influences on Aramaic*, 70.

**Alternative renderings of lines 10–11:**

- Alt. a. Then sheep, ox, (or) goat [in]deed (hʾ) shall be made there (as) *maqlû*  
(a burning-ceremony), but incense, grain-offering, [...]
- Alt. b. Then sheep, ox, (or) goat – [each/all] (KLʾ) shall be made there (as) *maqlû*  
(a burning-ceremony), but incense, grain-offering, [...]
- Alt. c. Then sheep, ox, (or) goat – the burning of the [whole] (KLʾ) shall be made,  
but incense, grain-offering, [...]
- Alt. d. Whether sheep, ox, (or) goat – (a place for) burning [in]deed (Hʾ) shall be made,  
but incense, grain-offering, [...]

The final clause “but incense, grain-offering, [...]” is probably a reference to a different location in which incense and grain-offering are performed. One is tempted to restore, “but incense (or) grain-offering [shall be made in the altar house.]” It must be remembered that Semitic-Mediterranean temples often contained a four-horned altar, or a variation thereof, where incense and small grain-offerings were made, but animal sacrifice and large-scale immolation occurred on a larger altar, which unlike the four-horned altars was always located outside of the temple’s building (Aram. BYT) though still within the temple complex (Aram. ʾGWRʾ). Keeping this in mind, it is compelling to see TAD A4.9 as a reference to the repair of the “altar house” (Aram. BYT MDBḤʾ),<sup>51</sup> while A4.10 focuses on the exterior altar complex.

The point to made is that like A4.9, when the roster of A4.10 is understood within its administrative context it cannot be construed as clear evidence of a prohibition on animal sacrifice. While all have followed Sachau’s restoration and interpreted A4.10 as such, other restorations are possible which produce the opposite meaning. Because animal sacrifice was an integral part of the services the temple offers its community, it seems unlikely that it would (agree to) forego this practice. Besides, the revived practice of animal sacrifices was seen as a selling point for Persian interests in Yedanyah’s proposal to Bagavahya the Governor of Judah (TAD A4.7:25–26).

## **CG no. 103 Votive Offerings and the Accounting of Sacrifices with a Comment on CG no. 17**

A final text regarding sacrifice and offerings should be mentioned because it may demonstrate an administrative feature of votive promises made by a suppliant.

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<sup>51</sup> In the Persian report of the events (TAD A4.5), the Iranian loanword ʾTRWDN may be used to describe what in Aramaic is the MDBḤʾ “altar.” However, see Barnea, “P. Berlin 13464,” in this volume, note 33.

The relevant text is CG no. 103, which is difficult to read. Unlike other ostraca, CG no. 103 contains a bore hole, and evidence of wear from hanging on a string is found in the bore hole as though it were worn as a triangular shaped amulet. Furthermore, a text was written on the concave side of the ostrakon then erased and a different text was written with a different pen on the convex side of the sherd. It is rare for Aramaic texts to have been written this way at Elephantine/Syene. The notes of Cowley and André Dupont-Sommer show that both struggled to read the ostrakon; Lozachmeur provided a more judicial reading and translation. After collating the document in person and from high-definition infrared photographs, I argue for the following translation:

**CG no. 103**

- cv 1. This clay(-receipt) (f.) is | of 'the grai'n offe'rings'
- cv 2. which he shall offer to Yah'ô'
- cv 3. one is 'Abah's
- cv 4. Just as are his offerings to be burned/Just as are Yaqaryah's.
- cv 5. 'Now, 2, are' his 'mo'ther's'.

The ostrakon appears to be a type of promissory note written in the form of a temporary amulet, reminding an offerer 'Abah to fulfill his family's promised offering. Temporary amulets, by definition, are not likely to survive in the archaeological record, but some are known from Mesopotamia and written in contemporary Babylonian.<sup>52</sup> Promised offerings are generally understood as votive vows which are made then paid at a later date, normally after the deity has fulfilled his/her end of the vowed request.<sup>53</sup> This ostrakon is our only glimpse into how the offering and perhaps sacrificial system at Elephantine worked. (As a reminder, the statements found in the Yedanyah Dossier refer to the system as a concept but do not describe it.)

I should mention that reference to sacrifice is also found in one of the administrative missives. CG no. 17 was sent to one named Natan, who appears to be directed to go to one named 'Ûryah. There is something written about a garment, and there is found the statement "[...] the sacrifice and you/she shall bring in" (CG no. 17 cv 4). The study mentioned in this article's introduction, which is in progress, argues that Natan was a courier who administers the transport of goods to and from the island, and 'Ûryah appears to be an administrator on the island

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<sup>52</sup> Finkel, "Amulets against Fever."

<sup>53</sup> No historically reliable source discusses the practice of making vows and issuing temporary amulets, however; biblical narratives such as Hannah's vow during her family's yearly trip to Shiloh (1 Sam 1) come to mind.

responsible for living animals, specifically sheep, wool, and garments. The text reads:

**CG no. 17**

- cc 1. [(Greetings,) Na]ʿtʿan. Now, I/you/she sent (word)[ ...]
- cc 2. [...] and I/you/she sent (word) ʿtoʿ
- cc 3. [... ]go (m.s.) to ʿŪryaʿhʿ[ ...]
- cc 4. [...] ° ( ° ) ° [...]
- cv 1. [...] the garment
- cv 2. [...] I shall make it
- cv 3. [...] ° was with me
- cv 4. [...] the sacrifice and you/she shall bring in
- cv 5. [...] to Paḥî
- cv 6. [...] ° ° [...]
- cc pal. 1. [...] this. And not [...]

I would suggest that an administrative priest, like ʿŪryah may have issued temporary amulets in the form of promissory notes to suppliants who journeyed across the river to the Yahô temple to perform a vow. As with legal promissory notes known from Mesopotamia, when the promissory vow was paid and the amulet delivered to the temple, the note was erased, to be reused or destroyed. CG no. 103 and indirectly supported by CG no. 17 provides enticing evidence of the temple economy engaging in votive offering practices and how the temple administered those vows. Vows in antiquity could have been made for several reasons, but a known time at which vows were made was during festivals, to which this study now turns.

## Cultic Festivals

The distribution of commodities appears to have occurred within the scope of the needs of the community. The ostraca indicate that items could be requested within a day's notice and sometimes on the same day, and the courier system maintained an efficient mode of transport that ferried items across the river. Beyond the references to "yesterday," "today," "evening," "tomorrow," "another day," "1 day," "3 days," "that day," and "quickly" are a few references to specific calendrical moments or events.<sup>54</sup> As is typical of previous Elephantine research, scholars have looked at these references to the calendar through a solely religious lens. Unfortunately, the contexts of these events yield hardly any useful religious

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<sup>54</sup> Lemaire, *Levantine Epigraphy*, 50–51.

or cultic information. Nearly all of the references appear in the ostraca missives, which is a large collection of administrative documents. Reference to calendrical moments are foremost about administrative time or the technicalities of the administration surrounding these calendrical moments.<sup>55</sup>

## Shabbat

The ostraca's references to Shabbat have been discussed at length by scholars.<sup>56</sup> I wish only to emphasize here that it seems to be a reference to a single day; its spelling with a final *heh* rather than *tav* remains a curiosity; and only two clear readings can be securely interpreted as the calendrical Shabbat (CG no. 152 and CG no. 186). Of these references it is well noted that CG no. 152 demands the addressee to meet the boat on Shabbat, so much has been said about the biblical prohibition against work on Shabbat and this reference, which clearly encourages work.<sup>57</sup> Nonetheless, it should be noted that this is one of only two clearly defined "days" in the corpus (see note 55). Whether it was a weekly moment in time as in later Hebrew or a bi-monthly occurrence as in Akkadian,<sup>58</sup> it served as an indication to the community as a marker of time. In my view it functioned as a way of demarcating the otherwise monotonous days for administrators and laborers who did not meticulously maintain the calendar. Other than the fact that the temple, as the administrative center of the community, maintained the calendar, it remains unclear if Shabbat served any religious, cultic, or festive purpose.

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55 Due to the fragmentary state of the texts, I have excluded for the sake of space references to fasting, something called "the day of wind/spirit," and a Ḥanukhah-dedication. For fasting, see Lemaire, "Ostraca of Elephantine," 48. Additionally the verb "to fast" may be found on CG no. 154 cv 2 which reads either [...] • ŠYM or [...] • ŠYM. Lozachmeur struggled to read the line. For the "day of wind/spirit" see CG no. 12 cc 4, but compare the Ahiqar Manuscript (TAD C1.1) pl. K r i 10. For what may be a reference to a Ḥanukhah-dedication, see CG no. 50 cc 4.

56 Recently see Lemaire, "Ostraca of Elephantine," 47; Becking, *Identity in Persian Egypt*, 28–31.

57 Note Lemaire's reservation about interpreting the relevant verb as "to meet" ("Ostraca of Elephantine," 47).

58 Compare the view of Lemaire, "Ostraca of Elephantine," 47 that the biblical references referred to a full moon feast.

## Passover

Passover is only found in the ostraca on two fragmentary ostraca missives, TAD D7.24 and CG no. 155, as well as on a third fully preserved ostrakon missive, TAD D7.6.<sup>59</sup> The latter of these reads:

**Oxford Bodl. Aram. Inscr. 7 (TAD D7.6)**

- cc 1. To Hôše'yah.
- cc 2. Your greetings. Now, look
- cc 3. over the children until
- cc 4. 'Aḥuṭab (3) can come. (4) Do not entrust(?)
- cc 5. them to another.
- cv 1. If their bread is ground,
- cv 2. knead bread, 1 qab, until
- cv 3. their mother will come. Send (word)
- cv 4. to me when you will make the Passover.
- cv 5. Continue sending greetings(-notes) of
- cv 6. the children.

As in this case, many of the ostraca focus on the ordering or shipment of food rations. Here again, the sender is concerned with timing: when the Passover will be made. This suggests that an administrative concern is in view. The Elephantine Passover is traditionally understood – from the biblical point of view – as a sacrifice prescribed on the 14th of Nisan (at least in Leviticus) followed the next day by the Feast of Weeks. But in this ostrakon, the Passover does not appear as a defined point in time. Its timing is selfreferential. While it seems possible the temple would have made the Judeans aware of when the Passover occurred, it is unclear if the festival was rigidly tied to the calendar and if it took place in the temple, in the Judean households, or both. A further difficulty with this ostrakon is identifying Hôše'yah. He clearly runs in the orbit of 'Aḥuṭab, who is the primary storehouse manager of dry-goods on the island. And 'Aḥuṭab runs in the orbit of 'Ūryah, who appears to be the manager of animals and animal products. So could it be that the sender is simply responsible for transporting the Passover animal(s) to or from the temple to the community homes? One can envision the Passover animal sent to the temple, slaughtered there, then returned across the river for consumption in the home. While this is conjecture, it is clear from other sources (e.g., TAD D7.8) that herdsmen residing off the island communicated with management (such as 'Ūryah) on the island about animals and shipments of meat.

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<sup>59</sup> For the possibility of the appearance of the term on CG no. 62 see Lemaire, "Ostraca of Elephantine," 47–48.

Whether the Passover resembles the biblical Passover, cannot be known. What is known is that those at Elephantine celebrated ritual feasts that are not prescribed in the biblical text, such as the Marzeah. Rather than imposing the biblical descriptions on the large gaps in our knowledge of Judean religious life at Elephantine,<sup>60</sup> scholars should rather contextualize the documents using reliable historical and cultural information, leaving questions open for future research.

## Marzeah

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly of the cultic festivals, is the Marzeah.<sup>61</sup> Its appearance on an ostrakon ascribed (and I think correctly)<sup>62</sup> to Elephantine further demonstrates the pan-Mediterranean and Northwest Semitic nature of the Judean community at Elephantine. Furthermore, given that fasting (see note 55) is an impromptu cultic activity, Shabbat could be a calendrical marker more than an event, and Passover may be a household event rather than a temple festival, the Marzeah stands out as the only community festival in the Elephantine documentation associated with the Yahô temple.

Most scholarship has discussed the Marzeah from the point of view of the late second millennium BCE Ugaritic evidence, in which it is depicted as a cultic association of professional (I would say administrative) businessmen within a temple context who engage in a festive drinking ceremony.<sup>63</sup> This general description for the event is not contradicted by the Persian period evidence, and therefore, Marzeah may safely be assumed to be a festival for temple associates and businessmen conducted at or under the auspices of the temple. Whether it extended to the public remains unclear. In 2018 Maria Giulia Amadasi Guzzo and José Zamora collected the three previously known Phoenician/Punic references

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<sup>60</sup> Previous scholars working on the ostraca have concluded that “there is no meaningful indication in the Elephantine ostraca of real religious syncretism among the Judeans at Elephantine (Lemaire, “Ostraca of Elephantine,” 49–50). Similarly, Lozachmeur, *La collection Clermont-Ganneau*, 533. I hold that the Marzeah should not be seen as syncretism, but as a native practice of this Judean community.

<sup>61</sup> Becking has studied the Elephantine Marzeah the most. For a synthesis of his views and a bibliography on the topic see *Identity in Persian Egypt*, 33–35, 152–153.

<sup>62</sup> Sayce, “An Aramaic Ostrakon,” 154–155, claims to have found the ostrakon in the Cairo Museum but that it was from Elephantine.

<sup>63</sup> See most recently, Mandell, “When Form is Function.” Note that she rightly argues that the Marzeah was not a funerary festival (55). Its continued association with the temple in Phoenician/Punic times supports this. The temple was not a location where rites for the dead were practiced, but rather the administrative center for the living.

to the Marzeah, (Carthage [KAI 69], Cyprus or Lebanon [Avigad and Greenfield], and Sidon [KAI 60]) and studied them in conjunction with a new ostrakon or vessel label referring to a food-offering to Ashtart and Melqart found at excavations of the acropolis of Idalion in Cyprus (IDA 974 [2001]). That same year Hans-Peter Mathys and Rolf A. Stucky published a few inscriptions from the excavations of the Eshmun sanctuary at Sidon (Bostan esh-Sheikh), one of which was a marble votive inscription referring to “reserving” the Marzeah and includes references to Ashtart and perhaps Shamash. All these sources date to or around the same time as the Persian period Judean settlement at Elephantine. The Phoenician evidence is becoming clearer that the Marzeah was a pan-Mediterranean and native Northwest Semitic festival, often associated with Ashtart/Astarte and other major deities. The festival focused on feasting in the context of a temple economy and on taxation for which votive payments could be made.

The sole reference to the Marzeah at Elephantine nicely fits this general temple economic context. The ostrakon reads:

**Ost. Cairo EM JdE 35468 a = TAD D7.29**

- cc 1. To Ḥaggay. I spoke
- cc 2. to ʾAšyan about the silver of
- cc 3. the Marzeah. Thus he said
- cc 4. to me: there is none.
- cc 5. Now, I shall give it
- cc 6. to Ḥaggay or
- cc 7. Yigdol. Send (a person)
- cc 8. to him,
- cc 9. and he shall give it
- cc 10. to you (m.p.).<sup>64</sup>

Whether the Marzeah refers to a ceremony at the Yahô temple or at a Northwest Semitic temple at Syene is unclear, but the reference to Yigdol, who can be identified as a messenger to the Yahô temple’s Judean administrators, is a good sign that this is in reference to a Marzeah practiced among the Judeans. The lines of interest read, “I spoke to ʾAšyan about the silver of the Marzeah. Thus he said to me: There is none” (cc 1–4). Some have interpreted this as a silver payment, in which case the notion would align with the option in the Carthaginian Marseille Tariff Text (KAI 69) for a person to compensate the temple in virtual currency. That said, here silver is not accompanied by a measurement, which is common

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<sup>64</sup> It is unclear if ʾAšyan’s statement is simply “there is none” (cc 4) or if it comprises the rest of the ostrakon (cc 4–10). Since Ḥaggay, the addressee, is mentioned in the third person, I suspect lines 4–10 are ʾAšyan’s instruction.

in the sources when it refers to payment. So we could read the reference to silver as a reference to silver-ware. Such an interpretation would align with the drinking and feasting activities for which the Marzaeh is known. But this interpretation further calls to mind the votive silver feasting vessels known from Egypt,<sup>65</sup> which were offered in a temple context, but some of which eventually may have been taxed by the Persians and sent to Persepolis.<sup>66</sup> This is especially compelling if we understand 'Ašyan as an Iranian name and, therefore, as an imperial representative, perhaps an accountant. The point to be made in this short study is that the Marzaeh was a native pan-Northwest Semitic (including Judean) festival celebrated across the Mediterranean. It nicely fits the Persian program of ritualized feasting and taxation, and it stands out among the references at Elephantine as perhaps the only ceremony practiced at the Yahô temple according to the surviving sources. It was depicted as the party of the year, so to speak, in which wealthy businessmen came together to feast and drink. The temple may have used this festival as a strategy to incentivize the wealthy to come pay their taxes, which they might be more likely to do while inebriated at a party where they can engage in drunken contests of devotion.

## What Historical Conclusions Can Be Drawn from the Data?

Gap-filling is needed to reconstruct any history, particularly one with only partially surviving documentation. My approach here has been to understand and interpret the Elephantine documents within their administrative contexts, and to avoid gap-filling with biblical data. From the surviving evidence, the temple of Yahô appears to have been a type of civil center, akin to those known in other ancient Near Eastern contexts, that served as the Judean community's access portal to the Persian administration. It was foremost an economic institution

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<sup>65</sup> Brooklyn nos. 54.50.32; 54.50.33; 54.50.34; 54.50.35; 54.50.36; 54.50.37; 54.50.38; 54.50.39; 54.50.40; 54.50.43a-c; 54.50.44a-b; 55.183; 57.121; 54.50.41 (handle); 54.50.42 (handle). The bronze vessels from the Achaemenid period, which are similar in typology, may have served the same function (e.g., Brooklyn 76.108 [Egyptian acquisition] or Muscarella, *Bronze and Iron*, 218–219 [Iranian acquisition; but see notes therein to similar excavated objects]).

<sup>66</sup> See Moore, "The Legality of Persian," particularly the discussion of text no. 3 (= TAD C3.13). In note 68 I write: "None have yet claimed, to my memory, a tax function for the silver bowls from Egypt. But Henkelman, "Imperial Signature," esp. 97–109 (and notes) discusses how precious vessels are part of the taxation system in the eastern provinces, and I thank him for suggesting to me that the Egyptian silver bowls may serve this purpose."

designed to ensure the stability of the Judean community of colonists, who lived mostly off the island on presumably state owned/allotted land.

Additionally, the temple also served the moral needs of the community by being a place in which vows could be made, but this cultural function was by no means its primary function.

This paper has further argued that the temple also served as a culturally specific judicial center for the Judean community, and likely also for other Persian colonists (much like the Khnum temple served for the Egyptian population). It adjudicated community disputes that were not elevated to the Persian authorities. The Persian authorities were concerned with very few types of disputes, mostly issues regarding state owned property or the legal (taxable) status of humans, particularly if the status of a human changed through emancipation or marriage. Only in the event of missing evidentiary documentation was the temple evoked to oversee oaths made by legal parties in the state judiciary.

Where the administrative training of the Yahô temple's personnel occurred is yet to be determined, but I agree with André Lemaire, who sees scribal education at Elephantine located within small home-school or small state institutional settings and not in the temple proper.<sup>67</sup> It is entirely possible that priests or temple oblates conducted scribal education in their own homes. Certainly priests or oblates would have learned skills – on the job training – but their basic education seems to have occurred formally under the auspice of a private apprenticeship or public institution that was not the temple.

To summarize, while it is incredibly difficult to find evidence of religion or religious systems in ancient Near Eastern documentation pertaining to temples and their administrative practices, there is enough evidence at Elephantine to tease out vignettes of cultic activity. These vignettes are possible when interpreted in the social and historical context of the temple economy, and they lead to different perspectives on the history of Judeans at Elephantine and Syene than those which have been constructed through the lens of the biblical texts.

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