

"PAPYRUS COWLEY 37, RECONSIDERED"

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The Papyrus : Cow. 37

The original papyrus is preserved at the Egyptian Museum under the serial number 3434-J-43471 (R) 3434 RZA7H (V).

The document, defective on the left, is a letter of seventeen incomplete lines of which contents entreat for support.

The letter is undated, but in analogy with Cow. 30 where the name Yedoniah is mentioned, as to whom the letter is addressed, it is presumable that the date is around 410 B.C.⁽¹⁾.

Purpose of Study

Two points of view that are different from those of Cowley makes re-reading this papyrus is inevitably needed.

I) That those Aramaic Papyri of the fifth century B.C. found in Egypt belonged to Aramaeans who settled at that time in Egypt. They did not belong neither to Jews, Israelites, nor to Samaritans⁽²⁾.

II) That $\pi\pi\omega$ - according to its meaning in Syriac-confirms the fact that the Egyptians were forced to paying contributions and tributes to the Persian rulers, not that they willingly paid bribes.

Reconsideration

As to the first point of view, few pretexts prove that these documents were written in Aramaic language by Aramaeans.

¹⁾ A. Cowley, Aramaic papyri of the fifth century B.C. Oxford, 1923, comments on p.30

²⁾ Ibid, introduction P.XV.

hey are as follows :

That the language was Aramaic in all its dialects, not only in biblical Aramaic known to the Jews but also in other dialects probably not known to the Jews.

I) (a) The term " ארמי " was frequently applied in the Papyri.

(b) Those settlers were identified in some Papyri (especially in those legal documents related to the time of Darius II) as Aramaeans of Syene and Aramaeans of Yeb.

(c) Cowley states that mentioning the expression "Aramaeans of Elphantine" three times in P. 25 is due to mere carelessness, yet this repetition confirms the fact that they were Aramaeans.

III) Cowley's statement that "there is no document in Hebrew, nor any direct evidence that Hebrew was used by the community for any purpose"⁽³⁾ goes as a proof that the Jews did not at that time hold high positions. They were only mercenaries in the Aramaean garrison.

IV) (a) Using the names of months according to the Egyptian calendar such as Phaophi, Thoth etc., not according to the Hebrew calendar such as adar, šbat etc.

(b) Counting on names to identify the writers of those papyri as Jews is uncertain, because there was always a confusion in names. For example the name Ma'auziah was mentioned once (Cowley 37) as one of the Lords to whom the letter was addressed, and in the other (Cowley 38) as one addressing a letter to the leaders of Yeb.

V) Those Papyri reflect the social and economic life of

³Op. Cit.

Aramaeans in Egypt. They contain matters of interest to Aramaeans such as contracts for loans, marriage contracts, legal documents.

VI) In regard to Cowley's hypothesis⁽⁴⁾ that the Aramaeans might also include Jews depending on the English translation to the verse Deut 26⁵, the present writer has a hypothesis that the Aramaeans do not include Jews depending on the verse itself in Hebrew.

The English translation inserts the verb "was" in order to conclude the meaning "A Syrian ready to perish was my father" but the Hebrew verse as a whole reads as :

מצרימה ויגר שם במתי מעט ויהי שם לגוי גדול עצום ורב

Hence the translation ought to be : "The Aramaean(s) perish (ed) my father and went to Egypt and domiciled there with a few and became there a nation great, mighty and populous.

The present writer's hypothesis that those who came to Egypt were the Aramaeans depends on the following:

(a) Avoiding the insertion of the verb "was" as long as it is not mentioned in the Hebrew verse.

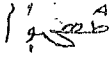
(b) Considering that the Hebrew verb " אבד " functions as intransitive meaning "to waste", and as transitive meaning "to lay waste".

(c) Considering that the syntax of the Hebrew verse maintains that אובד is either an adjective to ארמי or a present participle that goes back to ארמי . Besides, the form אובד takes the mūnah מונה (־) which is a conjunctive accent.

⁴ Ibid, introduction, P. XVI.

(d) Considering that waw consecutive with ויניד , ויגד , ויהי functions as continuing the event which the present participle ארוב commences.

(e) Depending on the fact that the Jews never described themselves as גוי "gentile, heathen", but ascribed the word only to the others.

VII) The word " מסגרא " (P. Cow. 44) refers to a place of worship of non Jews. Though Cowley translates it into temple in accordance with that temple in Jerusalem which he ascribed to Jews, yet this is disproved by the fact that the word " מסגרא " should be of Semitic origin meaning mosque Ar. " مسجد " Syriac  and that the Jews never called the places of worship mosques. The mosque found in Jerusalem should be Al Masged Alaqsa.

VIII) (a) Putting Ya'u temple as a border to the house of Yedoniah Bar Oriah, Aramaean of Yeb the fortress means that the writer was Aramaean as he would not recognize the existence of a god unless he was his god.

Ya'u as the male deity of the Semites, seems in its semitized form, to be the original of yahu⁽⁵⁾. The form יהה where the ה is "mater lectionis" of the final vowel ô, is not limited to Hebrew but also found in Meša^v inscription (נבה nebo 1/14, דודו 1/12)⁽⁶⁾

(b) The temple belonged to the Aramaeans because the Egyptians - before the Persian reign - used to treat the Aramaeans with toleration that they allowed them to build a

⁵ Muss Amolt, *The Concise Dictionary of the Assyrian language*, Vol. 2, 1924, p. 359.

⁶ D. Sommer, "Yahô et Yahô Seba'ot, *Comptes Rendus de L'Academie des Inscriptions & Belles Lettres*, Paris, 1947, P. 176.

temple similar to the temples of the Egyptians.

(c) Of all the temples the Persian rulers destroyed in Egypt, they would have never left a temple unless it belonged to the Aramaeans whom they considered very loyal and faithful.

As a proof of the Aramaeans loyalty to Persian rulers is that when the Egyptians revolted against the Persian reign they took revenge not only on the Persians but also on those who were on good terms with them. Hence they treated the Aramaeans with violence.

As to the second point of view, the present writer has the following pretexts :

The word " שחר " is preferably translated according to its meaning in Syriac) *ܣܚܪܐ* means "forced contribution"⁽⁷⁾

This is confirmed by the following facts.

(1) That the Egyptians were forced under the Persian rule to paying tributes.

(2) The Egyptian peasants revolted at the end of Darius reign (486 B.C) as a reaction to rating tributes and land taxes at random. "Darius" military operations to overcome the revolutionary provinces lasted twenty attacks"⁽⁸⁾

Also, during Darius II reign, the Egyptians revolted under the leadership of Amirta, but Darius II was not able to put down those revolutions (415 B.C according to some scholars, 410 B.C according to the others)⁽⁹⁾

That flare-up to regain the reign was a sign that the Egyptians did never seek to satisfy the Persian rulers by means

⁷ A Compendious Syriac dictionary founded upon the Thesaurus syriacus, R.P. Smith.

⁸ Hassan Pimia, Tarikh Iran al kadim, translated by M.N. Abdul Men'em, E.m. Elseba'i, Cairo, 1979, p. 97.

⁹ Ibid, P. 123.

of giving them bribes.

(3) When Cambyses assaulted Egypt in the year 525 B.C. he dominated the interior status. He ill treated the Egyptians and subdued them to all sorts of humiliation including forcing them to pay tributes.

An example of ill treatment of the Egyptians by Persian rulers is that accident when Cambyses came back to Egypt after his unsuccessful invasion on Etheopia and found the Egyptians rejoicing the feast of Apis calf, he thought that they were celebrating his defeat and vengeanced on them by massacring, torturing and subduing⁽¹⁰⁾ them in every way that they could not by all means in these circumstances be excused from paying tributes.

Conclusion :

Depending on the above mentioned pretexts, the papyrus is suggested to be read as follows :

- (1) אל מראי ידניה מעודיה אוריה וחילא עבדך] ...
- (2) ישאלו בכל ערן שלם לן חנה כענת בכל יום זי] ...
- (3) הו קבל פתיפרסן חד זיוך הו קבל פתיפרס א] חרן
- (4) איתי לן בזי מצריא שחד להן יהבן ומן זי] ...

¹⁰ P. Ayyad (quoting A. Fakhry, Siwa Oasis, Cairo, 1944, p. 29) in *Al Aramiyun fi Misr*, Cairo, 1968 pp. 32,33.

- (5) זי מצריא קדם ארשם להן גנבית עבדן אפֿ] חם ..
- (6) מדינת נא וכן אמרן מזדיזן הו פקיד למדינא] ...
- (7) נדחל בזי זעירן אנחנה ב // כען הא סכרנֿ] א ...
- (8) הן לו גלין אנפין על ארשם לכן ^{קדמן} לא כזנה הו] ה
- (9) יאמר מלין קדם ארשם פיסן מהשודך אנפין]
- (10) חשכחון דבש תקם חתֿלן חבלן משבי צל שוה
- (11) מלין לבתכם אתה פסו בר מנכי למנפי רה]
- (12) ופתיפרטא ויהב לי כסף סחתרן] // וחדה מנה]
- (13) חורי יהב לי כזי כלוהי על כדא אמר תירי בו]
- (14) בצוח מלכא וכלין להן ונזק ארשם וכפר צח] א
- (15) וחורי זי כלו כיום] // // לפאפי מסו אגרתא]
- (16) נעבד מלה
- (17) אל מראי יארניה מעוזיה] אוריה

Translation

1. To my lords Yedoniah, Ma^suziah, Uriah and the army, your servant [.....
2. Seek at all times, bestow, peace upon us, now and every day that
3. he received rations. One pay-day, he received an [extra] ration
4. It is so, that the Egyptians paid "forced contribution", and since
5. of the Egyptians before Arsames, but certainly act secretly
6. the provence of Thebes, and say thus; It is a mazdaean who is set over (the) province.
7. We fear because we are but two lesser, now behold, I thought
8. If we had appeared before Arsames previously. But it was not so.
9. He will speak words before Arsames, he pacified us, appeasing out anger
10. You find equally honey, castor oil, threads (or bandages), ropes, leather
Reverse.
11. Your hearts are full of Pasu b Munnki came to Memphis and
12. and the ration; and he gave me the sum of 12 Staters, and one

13. Hori gave me, since they had with held it on account of the pitcher. Tirib.... said
14. by order of the king and we withheld (it) from them. so he gave damages against Arsames and pardoned Zeho.
15. and Hori whom they hindered on the 6th day of Phaophi, the letters came
16. will do the thing
17. To my lords Yedoniah, Ma'uziah, Uriah.

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