

CHANUKAH SUPPLEMENT

הרבים ביד המעטים

It is fair to ask the following question about הנוכה: how was it that the few did overcome the many? Was it solely a miracle or were there any other factors involved? Ben Zion Kahana in his introduction to the Book of the Maccabees, page 75-76, may provide an answer when he describes the occupations that the Jews in ארץ ישראל pursued at the time of the הנוכה story:

אומה זו שביהודה עיקר עסקה בעבודת אדמה היא. יוסיפוס מעיד: אין אנו עם של מסחר. חוץ מזה, היו מעטים בגליל שהיו עוסקים גם במשלח יד ממקצעות אחרים: מסביב לים כנרת היו עוסקים בדיוג ובאכספורט של דגים מלוחים. צפורי שבגליל היתה עיר של אורגים, נצרת, עיר של חרשי עץ.

Translation: This nation that dwelled in Judea undertook farming as its primary occupation. Josephus testifies: we were not a nation of businessmen. In addition to that occupation, some in the Galilee were involved in other occupations: around the Sea of Galilee they were involved in fishing and in the export of salted fish. The city of Tzipori in the Galilee was known as a city of weavers; Nazareth, as a city of woodworkers.

חוץ מעבודת האדמה היה להם, ליהודים, עוד מקצוע שהצטיינו בו: עבודת הצבא. במקצוע זה היו מפורסמים בעולם הרחב. ביב שבמצרים היתה מושבת של חיילים יהודיים עוד במאה החמישית לפני סה"נ. התלמיים היו יוצאים הרבה יהודים מארץ ישראל ומושיבים אותם כאנשי חיל במצרים, ובסוף המאה השניה לפני סה"נ היו שרי צבא יהודיים אצל התלמיים. אנטיוכוס III הגדול העיר אלפים משפחות יהודיות מבבל ללודיה ופוגיה (שבאסיה הקטנה) שישמו לו שם מצב צבאי. מלכי היוונים במזרח היו משתמשים החיילים שכירים מן היהודים, ועוד.

Translation: In addition to working in farming, the Jews occupied themselves in another area: as mercenaries. The Jews were known worldwide as excelling in that occupation. Bayeb in Egypt was the home of a group of Jewish mercenaries already in the fifth Century BCE. The Ptolemies deported many Jews from Israel and placed them as soldiers in Egypt. At the end of the second Century BCE there were Jewish military officers in the armies of the Ptolemies. Antiochus III the Great transplanted 1000 Jewish families from Babylonia to Lod and Puglia which were in Asia Minor to establish a military stronghold. The Greek kings in the East made use of Jewish mercenary soldiers and so did others.

החיילים היהודים היו ידועים בגבורתם: הם היו בזים לפצעים ולמות (המושג העברי הלל כולל את שניהם!) הכל היה הפקר לגבי היהודי כשהיה נלחם על ענין שהיה קרוב אל לבו. העולם היווני – הרומי היה חרד מפני הגבורים היהודים: שונאי ישראל הראשונים היו מונים

להם, ליהודים, בעיקר שהם קשים להכנעה ועומדים בהתלהבותם המרדנית. כשנתגבשו הגייסות של הרומיים בשנות הששים של המאה הראשונה לסה"נ עם קנאי היהודים שבגליל הודו שבימיהם לא נפגשו באויב מר כזה.

Translation: The Jewish mercenaries were known for their courage: they would plunder despite knowing that they could be wounded or die (the Hebrew concept of being killed in battle includes both ideas). A Jew who fought for what he believed in would hold nothing back. The Greco-Roman World was wary of Jewish war heroes: the enemies of the Jews considered them hard to cause to surrender and steadfast in their rebellious nature. When the Roman recruits encountered the zealous Jews in Galilee in the year 60 of the Common Era, they conceded that in their time they had never encountered a more difficult enemy as the Jews.

Part of the basis for the military success that the Jews enjoyed at the time of the **הנוכה** story must be attributed to their abilities as soldiers. (Notice the parallel with Israel's War of Independence). The following excerpts support Ben Zion Kahana's position that in ancient times Jews excelled as military personnel.

The Lifetime of a Jew throughout the Ages of Jewish History, by Hayyim Schauss; Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1950, page 139:

An Ancient Marriage Record. . . At the beginning of this century, an actual marriage record of a Jewish family during the period of the return from the Babylonian exile was discovered giving real names and facts, the oldest marriage contract in Jewish history.

The marriage did not take place in Palestine or among the exiles in Babylon, but among the Jews of Elephantine and Assuan, at the southern border of Egypt, by the first cataract of the Nile (see p. 27).

Jews came to that remote part of Egypt as soldiers hired into foreign service. They were organized as a military colony among mercenaries of many other nations. Most of the soldiers in the garrison apparently were Jews. It seems that they were originally hired and brought over by the Egyptian kings from poor homes in Palestine in the latter days of the First Temple, when Egypt had regained her independence. Later, when Egypt was conquered by the Persian Empire, these Jewish mercenaries continued in military service under the Persian government. All of the records unearthed at Elephantine and Assuan belong to the time of the Persian domination. They are papyri inscribed in Aramaic, the universal language of the Persian Empire west of the Euphrates.

The Jews of Elephantine and Assuan were professional soldiers, obliged to go to war to defend the southern frontier of Egypt. This vocation was transmitted from father to son. They were soldiers and also colonists who owned property. They married, had families and had ample leisure for peaceful occupations. Some soldiers even engaged in trade with the

people with whom they lived. As soldiers, the Jews of Elephantine and Assuan were an integral part of the military organization. They were called officially "Jewish army" and were divided into groups, each of which had a flag of its own. As Jews, they had autonomy, their own religious community, their own Jewish court, and a temple in which sacrifices were offered to the God of Israel.

Most of the business documents which were unearthed in Elephantine and Assuan belonged to the family of a well-to-do Jewish soldier named Machseiah, the son of Yedaniah. In the documents, his daughter, Mibtachiah, married and received a valuable piece of property as dowry from her father. Her first husband died and she remarried, this time a non-Jew, an Egyptian by the name of As-Hor, who was called "the architect of the king." In the documents of his sons, As-Hor bears the Jewish name Nathan. Apparently he became a proselyte to the Jewish faith, and his sons bore Jewish names.

We are concerned with the marriage contract of Mibtachiah and As-Hor. It began with a declaration of marriage by As-Hor to Mibtachiah's father. "I came to thy house for thee to give me thy daughter, Mibtachiah, to wife; she is my wife and I am her husband from this day and forever" (see p. 130). Following this declaration of betrothal, all terms of the marriage contract were written in detail. As-Hor paid Machseiah, the father, five shekels, Persian standard, as a mohar for his daughter. Besides, Mibtachiah received a gift of 65 1/2 shekels from As-Hor. From this we gather that the mohar which fathers received for their daughters was then merely a nominal payment, the formality of a lingering custom of olden times.

Of the 65 1/2 shekels that Mibtachiah received from As-Hor, twelve shekels were in cash, the remainder in clothing and utensils. A complete list of the gifts Mibtachiah received is given and fully described, in regard to quality, size, and value: one garment of wool, dyed new, embroidered, on both sides, 8 by 5 cubits; one closely woven shawl, new, 7 by 5; another garment of spun wool, 6 by 3; one mirror, one tray, two cups, and one bowl, all of bronze. Each one of these items is also appraised in cash. According to the marriage contract, Mibtachiah had equal rights with her husband. She had her own property which she could bequeath as she pleased, and she had the right to pronounce a sentence of divorce against As-Hor, even as he had the right to pronounce it against her. All she had to do was to appear before the court of the community and declare that she had developed an aversion to As-Hor. We do not know to what degree the equality of rights enjoyed by Jewish women of Elephantine was due to Jewish or to Persian-Babylonian law.

Mibtachiah impresses us as a very active woman. She was energetic and enterprising, had property of her own and was on an equal footing with her husband. She was also very particular about the cosmetics with which she beautified herself. Among the articles which she received from her father was mentioned a new ivory cosmetic box.

At the conclusion of Mibtachiah's marriage contract, the name of the scribe appeared. He was Nathan, the son of Ananiah, who had written the deed at the dictation of As-Hor. The names of three witnesses appeared on this remarkable document, which was written about the time Nehemiah was rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

The betrothal of Mibtachiah to the Egyptian architect AsHor presumably took place at the house of Machseiah, son of Yedaniah. Imagine the house crowded with Jews as well as Egyptians, the relatives and friends of both the Jewish bride, Mibtachiah, and the Egyptian groom, As-Hor. After paying the mohar and delivering the gifts to Mibtachiah, the robust and simple folk of this military colony partook of a festive meal amid boisterous joy and merriment.

Christianity and Its Judaic Heritage: An Introduction with Selected Sources by Carl E. Purinton; Ronald Press, 1961 page 94

The Elephantine Papyri, 450-400 B.C.

[These papyrus letters reflect the life of a Jewish military colony located on the island of Elephantine at the first cataract of the Nile, near the present Aswan. Egypt at this time was a province of the Persian Empire and Jewish mercenaries were stationed there to guard the southern boundary. The longest of the eight letters is a request addressed to Bagoas, governor of Jerusalem, for permission to rebuild the temple to Yahu, which had been destroyed in an outburst of anti-Semitic violence. From other published correspondence it is known that the Jews of Elephantine wrote letters to the high priest in Jerusalem and to the sons of Sanballat, former governor of Samaria, for assistance in rebuilding the temple. No reply was received from the former, but the rulers of Samaria and Bagoas, governor of Judah, recommended a petition to Arsham, the Persian satrap of Egypt. The letter to Bagoas is printed here. The most surprising letter is one listing contributions to the cult of Yahu and also to two other deities apparently worshiped along with Yahu in the temple at Elephantine.]