

SPARTA

In the first Book of Maccabees¹ we read about a correspondence between Jonathan the high priest in Israel and the people of Sparta, and the context is as follows: "Jonathan, the High Priest, the council of the nation, the priests and the rest of the Jewish people to their Spartan BROTHERS, greetings! Even before this, a letter was sent to Onias the High Priest from Areius who was then king among you, to the effect that you are OUR KINSMEN,² as the copy herewith submitted sets forth. Onias received the man who was sent honorably, and accepted the letter in which declaration was made about alliance and friendship. Although we are not in need of these pledges, since we find encouragement in the holy books which we possess, we have undertaken to send to you to renew the pact of brotherhood and friendship, that we may not BECOME ESTRANGED from you; for much time has gone by since you sent word to us, So we remember you at every opportunity incessantly ON THE FESTIVALS and at other appropriate days, IN THE SACRIFICES which we offer and IN OUR PRAYERS, as it is right and fitting to recall OUR KINSMEN" (my emphasis—N. G.)

In this letter the Spartans are named kinsmen (brothers in the Hebrew translation). Perhaps this is only a manner of speech, but the astonishing facts in this letter are that Areius king of Sparta initially sent a letter to Onias the priest, and "although we are not in need of these pledges... we have undertaken to send to you...that we may not become estranged from you..." and "we remember you at every opportunity incessantly on the festivals and other appropriate days, in the sacrifices which we offer and in our prayers, as it is right and fitting to recall our kinsmen". What have festivals, sacrifices, and prayers to do with all this and what does estrangement mean in this context, if all that is at issue here is a pact? It is even more strange when reference is made to letters sent in bygone days, in the period of Areius and Onias and "Much time has gone by since you sent word to us..." etc. The significance of the text most probably implies much stronger ties than a simple pact.

The Book of Maccabees includes the letter that Areius King of Sparta sent

1 The First Book of Maccabees, 12: 5–12, English translation by Tedesche, Harper & Brothers, New York, 1950.

2 In note no. 7 to this verse the translator writes: "Apparently there was a legend in the Orient that the Spartans and the Jews were of the same ancestry".

to Onias the priest, and which Jonathan the priest refers to in his letter to the Spartans.

"This is the copy of the letter which they sent to Onias, Areius King of Spartans to Onias the High priest greetings! IT HAS BEEN FOUND IN A DOCUMENT ABOUT THE SPARTANS AND JEWS THAT THEY ARE RELATED, AND THAT THEY ARE OF THE FAMILY OF ABRAHAM³. SINCE WE HAVE LEARNED THIS will you please write us about your welfare. We are writing in turn to you that your cattle and property are ours, and ours are yours. We charge then, therefore, to report this to you."⁴ (my emphasis—N. G.).

In this letter it is explicitly noted that they are brothers jointly descended from Abraham, and when this fact was discovered, after it was found in a document, they wrote this letter. Hence the reason for their writing was not to suggest the formation of a pact, but to impart the knowledge that they are brothers (kinsmen) and common descendants of Abraham. The Spartans' dwelling on the fact they are related to Abraham is thus not just fanciful phraseology and rhetoric. After all the reference is not to the sons (descendants) of Adam or Noah – names inclusive of the entire human race, but to the sons of Abraham, that is to a specific ethnic group. Today even the Jews are called the sons of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Therefore the term "kinsmen" (brothers) in this letter is to be understood as indicating a blood relationship between the Jews (Judeans) and Spartans. The indicated kinship may be inferred from what is written about Jason the High priest who went "to the Lacedaemonians, with the hope of obtaining shelter there by reason of their common origin"⁵. As noted by Herodotus (V, 57 ; I, 56: IV, 147), the Spartans – the Lacedaemonians – were related to the Phoenicians. We may now also understand the kinship between the Spartans and the Jews as indicated in the book of Maccabees, since "Phoenicians" is the name given to the entire nation of Israel

It may be noted here that Neiman⁶ derives the name Sepharad (the Hebrew name for Spain) from the name Sparta or Sparda which according to Strabo was the name of a place near Taraco. In course of time this name came to embrace the entire peninsula. According to Neiman Sparta –Lacedaemonia was also called Sepharad⁷. Perhaps this will serve to explain the verse in the book of Obadiah: "and the captivity of Jerusalem, which is in Sepharad shall possess the cities of the south"⁸. So it is the dispersion of Jerusalem which

3 The translator here refers the reader to note no. 7 above.

4 The First Book of Maccabees, 12: 19–23,

5 The Book of Maccabees, II 5: 9. The translator notes here: "Apparently there was a legend that the Lacedaemonians and the Jews were of the same ancestry".

6 Neiman, Sefarad The Name Of Spain, JNES. 1963, pp. 128–132.

7 Neiman, *ibid.* p. 132

8 Obadiah, 1: 20

is in Sparta which "We remember at every opportunity incessantly on the festivals and at other appropriate days, in the sacrifices which we offer and in the prayers, as it is right and fitting to recall our kinsmen" (Hebrew reads "brothers").

Prof. Slouschz pointed to the many similarities in different spheres between those called Phoenicians and the Israelites. According to him the language is the same language.⁹ the culture is the same culture. In his own words: "From the way in which this (culture) emerges before the Hebrew scholar out of numerous texts found at Carthage which were interpreted through Phoenician inscriptions and Israelite literature, Carthaginian civilisation appears to be purely and simply Hebraic."¹⁰ He suggests that the figures of Samson and Joshua have their origine in the same mythical conceptions as does the figure of Melkart in Tyre. The Bull is the Emblem of the Israelite Sun God just as it is of Melkart,¹¹ The social structure was the same. In Carthage as in Jerusalem there existed a Sanhedrin (a council of 71 elders)¹², In Carthage as in Israel there were Judges (Shofetim) at the head of the nation. The religious structure was also identical. Moreover even linguistic changes and periods of linguistic shifts developed at Carthage parallel to those in Israel¹³ Any place originally inhabited by Phoenicians later became inhabited by Jews.

Prof. Slouschz was led to conclude that because of their identical characteristics the so-called Phoenicians and the Hebrews in the days of the Judges formed a single ethnic group.¹⁴ On the other hand he also interpreted the biblical verse "Asher lo horish' the inhabitants of Sidon" etc. as meaning Asher did not conquer these cities. However since the town of Tyre is not mentioned in the list of towns that Asher did not "lehorish" Prof. Slouschz concluded¹⁵ that Tyre was indeed conquered by the Israelites while Sidon was not conquered. This inevitably led him to assume that the Israelites and "Phoenicians" were two different nations and that the many similarities between them resulted because the two nations belonged to a single ethnic group, which group was part of the Benei Kedem (children of the East). He thinks that some of the Hebrews joined with the Phoenicians to form a new race which he labels "Phoenician-Hebrews", with an identical language, script, religion and a homogeneous culture, this new race of "Hebrew-Phoenicians" set out on its travels throughout the Mediterranean and practised commerce

9 Slouschz, *La Civilisation Hebraique et Phénicienne A' Carthage*

10 Slouschz, *ibid.* p. 6.

11 Slouschz, *Hebreo – Phéniciens et Judeo-Berbères*, p. 59.

12 Slouschz, *ibid.*, p. 183. cites Justin. I. 18, 7.

13 Slouschz, *La Civilisation Hebraique et Phénicienne A' Carthage*, p. 16.
–*Hebreo-Phéniciens et Judeo-Berbères*, p. 180.

14 Slouschz, *ibid.* p. 60.

15 Slouschz, *La Civilisation Hebraique et Phénicienne A' Carthage*, p. 8.

and established colonies. The religion of these Hebrew–Phoenicians was primitively Jewish notably different from the Jewish religion after the Exile (The Ezra period).¹⁶

I consider Prof. Slouschz to have been mistaken in his interpretation of the particular biblical verse by his assuming that the Israelites did not conquer Sidon; and this led him to the conclusion that the "Phoenicians" and the "Israelites" were two different nations.

Slouschz is by no means not the only scholar to point to the similarities between the so-called Phoenicians and the Israelites. Most scholars in fact do so, as discussed in previous chapters.

16 Slouschz, *Hebreo-Phéniciens et Judeo-Berbères*, pp. 136–137, 448