

Previously, at Elephantine

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This article looks at the evidence for a turbulent episode in the life of the Jewish community at Elephantine. In the months leading up to the destruction of the Yaho temple, the summer of 410 BCE, Jews and Egyptians found themselves at loggerheads in a conflict about a precious stone. The stone had been stolen from the Egyptians and then turned up in the hands of Jewish traders. Six letters from the Elephantine archives document the affair. Their analysis leads to the reconstruction of a crucial period in the relations between Persians, Jews, and Egyptians in the late Achaemenid era.

Among the various events in the life of the Jewish community of Elephantine, documented by papyri and potsherds covering the entire fifth century BCE, the destruction of their temple in 410 BCE has traditionally attracted most attention. Indeed, it has become its defining moment, and since we know about the event only through Jewish sources, the story is traditionally told from their perspective: pious Jews, loyal to the Persian authorities, victims of anti-Semitic violence at the hands of their Egyptian neighbors. Most historians realize that this is a very one-sided view, but it is not so easy to resist the lure of a familiar tale—another Jewish temple destroyed by their enemies.¹ This contribution is not an attempt to tell the other side of the story, but tries to put the events of 410 in historical perspective. The Egyptian aggression had been building during the years previous; one incident in particular had sparked their anger—the affair of the stolen stone.

THE AFFAIR OF THE STOLEN STONE: PRESENTATION OF THE EVIDENCE

Not long before the violent summer of 410 there was another incident at Elephantine, pitting Egyptians and Jews against each other. The cause of their clash was a precious stone. Jewish traders had acquired the piece expecting to make a good profit on its sale to a client in Memphis. As it turned out, the stone had been stolen from the Egyptian community on the island. After the boat with the commercial cargo had left Elephantine harbor, the Egyptians of the island discovered the theft and notified the authorities. They suspected the Jews of either robbery or receiving stolen goods. If Jewish traders had acquired the stone for commercial purposes, they were in fact engaged in buying and selling stolen property.

The conflict was initially dealt with by the local commander of the garrison at Syene. He went after the shipment and made sure the cargo did not reach Memphis. In addition, he ordered the detention of the main commercial agent of the business consortium and of the secretary-treasurer of the Jewish community. But the matter was too big to remain local. The Persian authorities in Memphis were informed and started an investigation. From that moment on, matters went from bad to worse.

1. Amidst a spate of publications showcasing the destruction of the Yaho temple at Elephantine as a symbol of “the emergence of an anti-Jewish tradition,” see, e.g., David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013), 17–19, quotation p. 19; Peter Schäfer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes towards the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1997), 121–35 (“anti-Jewish outburst,” p. 135).

The evidence for the reconstruction of the story consists of six letters. Letter No. 1 was written by Maʿuzyah son of Natan, secretary-treasurer of the Jewish community; he wrote to the community's presidium in the autumn of 411 (A4.3). Letters Nos. 2, 3, 4, and 5 were all sent by Hosea son of Natan (A3.7, A3.6, A4.2, A3.8). Hosea was stationed in Memphis as representative and commercial agent of a Jewish business consortium from Elephantine. Hosea son of Natan sent letters Nos. 2 and 3 at the same time, the one to an influential client at Elephantine, the other to a junior colleague on the island. They preceded Maʿuzyah's letter to the leadership by about a month. However, since their implications become clear only in light of Maʿuzyah's message, the discussion of the evidence will deviate at this point from its chronological order. Letter No. 4 was written in early February 410 (in response to letters received on the 6th of the Egyptian month Paopi, ca. January 20, A4.2:15), and letter No. 5 on the 27th of Tybi (ca. May 10, A4.3.8:14). Unfortunately, letter No. 4, perhaps the most crucial piece in the file, is severely damaged. In fact, the name of the sender is lost. In view of its subject matter, though, Hosea son of Natan is a safe guess. Letter No. 5 is a cry for help, from Hosea son of Natan to Ḥaggus son of Hodo, the recipient being related to Hosea by both commercial and family ties. The last piece in the file is a report by Yislaḥ son of Natan to Yislaḥ son of Gaddul, the sender writing from Thebes, the recipient a temple scribe in Elephantine. The bulk of the report consists of a detailed list of the Jewish men and women who had been arrested and a summary of what seems to be the end of the affair (A4.4). This letter No. 6 is the latest of the group, most likely sent in June 410. Two months later, the Egyptians troops would destroy the temple of Yaho.

None of the letters is dated by year. Fortunately, though, the most explicit letter has two references that imply a date after which and a date before which the matter must have developed (A4.3).² The *post quem* is the time of the mission of Ḥananyah to Egypt: "You know that Ḥnum has been against us since Ḥananyah came to Egypt until now" (A4.3:7). Ḥananyah's mission can be dated to 419 (see A4.1). The *ante quem* falls somewhere in the course of the year 410. By the summer of 410, Vidranga, the longtime garrison commander of Syene, had been promoted to the rank of *frataraka* 'governor' (A4.5:4, A4.7:5//A4.8:5).³ His son Naphaina succeeded him as garrison commander (A4.7:7//A4.8:6). At the time the conflict about the stolen stone was in its early stages, Vidranga was still the garrison commander (A4.3:3). Two other letters from the file are dated by month and day. One was written in response to letters received by the end of January (A4.2:15); the other is dated around the middle of May (A3.8:14). Judging by the pace of the events, these dates must have fallen in the same year. Since the letters reflect a later stage in the developments, this must have been 410. Things had started in the second half of 411.

The three letter writers share the same patronym; each of them has a father called Natan. This might give the impression that they are brothers, but such is not the case. In fact, Natan is a very common name at Elephantine. Maʿuzyah son of Natan is from a scribal family, some of whose members served in the capacity of secretary of the Jewish community. His full lineage is Maʿuzyah son of Natan son of ʿAnanyah son of Hosea son of Hodawyah.⁴ The

2. Unless explicitly stated otherwise, all references to Elephantine papyri and potsherds are to the edition by Bezalel Porten and Ada Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1986–1999), its four volumes being referred to here as A, B, C, and D.

3. On *frataraka*, see Jan Tavernier, *Iranica in the Achaemenid Period (ca. 550–330 B.C.)* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 412.

4. On the scribal family that Maʿuzyah son of Natan son of ʿAnanyah belonged to, see Bezalel Porten, *Archives from Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1968), 193 and n. 19; Alejandro F. Botta, *The Aramaic and Egyptian Legal Traditions at Elephantine* (Lon-

full lineage of Yislaḥ son of Natan is Yislaḥ son of Natan son of Gaddul son of Baʿadyah son of Gaddul.⁵ Finally, Hosea son of Natan had a grandfather called Hosea and a great-grandfather called Šepanyah.⁶ So in terms of family, the three letter writers were unrelated. All three came from the Jewish community at Elephantine and were involved, in one capacity or another, in the affair of the stolen stone.

THE LETTER OF MAʿUZYAH

In the presentation of the evidence, the letter of Maʿuzyah (A4.3) has been assigned No. 1, not by virtue of its presumed date, but because it is the one letter that illuminates the meaning of the others.⁷ Chronologically speaking, the letter of Maʿuzyah comes after letters Nos. 2 and 3 and before letter No. 4; it was written in the autumn of 411.

¹ To my lords Yedanyah; ²Uriyah and the priests of Yaho the God; Mattan son of Yašobyah, Berkayah son of [NN]; ² your servant Maʿuzyah. [May the God of Heaven seek after] the welfare of my lords [very much at all times; and] may you be in favor before ³ the God of Heaven. Now then, when Vidranga, the garrison commander, arrived in Abydos he arrested me on account of one precious stone which ⁴ they found stolen in the hands of the traders. Afterwards, Šeḥa and Ḥor, the servants of ʿAnani, pleaded with Vidranga ⁵ and Ḥornufi, with the help of the God of Heaven, until they set me free. And now, behold, they are coming there to you; you must pay attention to them. ⁶ Anything or any action that Šeḥa and Ḥor might ask from you—you must be at their disposition, so that they will not find anything evil ⁷ about you. You know that Ḥnum has been against us since Ḥananyah came to Egypt until now. ⁸ Now whatever you will do for Ḥor, you will be doing for the ch[ancell]or (*lb[ʿlt]ʿm*). Ḥor is an assistant of Ḥananyah (error for:

don: T&T Clark, 2009), 40–43; Eleonora Cussini, “The Career of Some Elephantine and Murašû Scribes and Witnesses,” in *In the Shadow of Bezalel: Aramaic, Biblical, and Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Bezalel Porten*, ed. Alejandro F. Botta (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 39–52, esp. 39–40. To their discussion it may be added that the scribe ʿAnanyah (variant: ʿAnani) was the son of Hosea; see Hélène Lozachmeur, *La Collection Clermont-Ganneau: Ostraca, épigraphes sur jarre, étiquettes de bois* (Paris: De Boccard, 2006), 421 no. X11:5. In view of the scribal profession that ran in the family, we may identify this Hosea, father of the scribe ʿAnanyah, with Hosea son of Hodawyah, who was the secretary-treasurer of the Jewish community of Elephantine during the first quarter of the fifth century; see B5.1:9 (495, witness), B4.4:1–2, 18 (//B4.3:1–2, 21, 483, scribe); D7.6, message addressed to Hosea (*hwšʿyh*), where it is implied that he is responsible for determining the date of Passover; D7.24, with a reference to a letter order by Rawaka, garrison commander at the time, to be shown to Hosea.

5. Who was Natan the father of Yislaḥ? The most likely candidate is Natan son of Gaddul son of Baʿadyah, witness of a marriage contract in 449 (B3.3:15). Natan son of Gaddul was the brother of Dalah son of Gaddul (B3.6:17, 427), brother of Menahem son of Gaddul son of Baʿadyah (B2.9:17, 420; B2.10:18, 416; B2.11:15, 410), and brother of Yislaḥ son of Gaddul (B2.10:19, 416; B3.8:43, 420); see also Cussini, “The Career,” 39. Because he had a son named Gaddul, Baʿadyah is most likely to be identified with Baʿadyah son of Gaddul (see Lozachmeur, *La Collection Clermont-Ganneau*, 449, no. J9 [= Cl.-G. 221+231+X1]:16). In other words, Yislaḥ son of Gaddul, the recipient of Yislaḥ son of Natan’s letter, was the uncle of the letter writer.

6. The full lineage is found in C3.15:7, a list of temple contributions, 400. Hosea son of Natan occurs as witness in B3.10:24, 404.

7. Some of the more recent treatments of this letter include Bezalel Porten, “Recommendation to Aid Two Benefactors,” in *The Context of Scripture*, ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger (Leiden: Brill, 1997–2002), vol. 3: 119–21; James M. Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 67–68, no. 31; Ingo Kottsieper, “Hebräische, transjordanische und aramäische Briefe,” in *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments*, Neue Folge 3: *Briefe*, ed. Bernd Janowski and Gernot Wilhelm (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006), 357–83, esp. 360–61; Anke Joisten-Pruschke, *Das religiöse Leben der Juden von Elephantine in der Achämenidenzeit* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008), 168–73; Bezalel Porten, *The Elephantine Papyri in English: Three Millennia of Cross-Cultural Continuity and Change*, 2nd rev. ed. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 131–33; Angela Rohmoser, *Götter, Tempel und Kult der Judäo-Aramäer von Elephantine: Archäologische und schriftliche Zeugnisse aus dem perserzeitlichen Ägypten* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014), 388–90.

‘Anani). You, bring out (*zwlw*) from our houses our possessions. ⁹ Give him whatever your hand finds; this shall not be a loss for you. That is why I am sending you (this message). He ¹⁰ said to me: “Send a written order (*ʔgrh*) ahead of me (saying:) ‘[Bri]ng out (*[zw]lw*)! For a serious loss there is back-up in the house of ‘Anani.’” The way you will deal ¹¹ with him will not be hidden from ‘Anani. ¹² [Address:] To my lords Yedanyah; ³Uriyah and the priests; and the Jews; your servant Maʿuzyah son of Natan.

If it were not for the report of Maʿuzyah son of Natan to the leadership of the Jewish community, we would probably never have guessed the nature of the incident that caused all the trouble. Maʿuzyah makes it clear that it was all about a stolen stone. He refers to this stone as “one *ʔbnšrp*.” This was a stone of some sort (*ʔbn* is the common Semitic word for ‘stone’), but of what kind exactly is a mystery.⁸ Some commentators have adduced the Ugaritic *abn šrp* (KTU 4.182:10) in comparison, translations of which run from ‘semi-precious stone’,⁹ via ‘red-dyed stone’,¹⁰ to ‘alum’.¹¹ In view of all the concern caused by a single stone at Elephantine, it must have represented quite some value. It is unlikely therefore that the Aramaic term and the Ugaritic expression—separated by some 1000 years—refer to the same reality. The *ʔbnšrp* that Maʿuzyah speaks of was both precious and pricy—a costly ruby or some other special stone, the element *šrp* referring either to its color (red) or to the fact that it had been set in a piece of silver jewelry.¹² Whatever its precise nature, the stone was a very special item; its disappearance unleashed an animosity between Jews and Egyptians that so far had been dormant.

This precious stone had become a bone of contention between the Jews and the Egyptian community at Elephantine. Though the Persian garrison commander made the arrest, the real adversaries of the Jews were the Egyptians of the island. The Egyptian Ḥornufi, otherwise unknown, had come with Vidranga to identify the stone. When Maʿuzyah enjoined the Jewish community to cooperate fully with the search that Ḥor and Šeḥa would be conducting, he reminded his readers of Ḥananyah: “You know that Ḥnum has been against us since Ḥananyah came to Egypt until now” (A4.3:7). Ḥnum is the Egyptian god of Elephantine, and here his name stands for the local Egyptian community. Obviously, relations between Jews and Egyptians had begun to suffer under the impact of Ḥananyah’s mission. In view of the one letter known from Ḥananyah (A4.1, 419), he had come by order of the Persian king to help organize the religious life of the Jewish diaspora in Egypt. His mission implied the official recognition of the Jews at Elephantine as a religious community.¹³ The Egyptians on the island had mixed feelings about the new status of the Jews.

8. See the discussion in Jacob Hoftijzer and Karel Jongeling, *Dictionary of North-West Semitic Inscriptions* (Leiden: Brill, 1995) [henceforth: *DNWSI*], 976 s.v. *šrp*₂. Lindenberger (*Letters*, 68) suggests ‘rhinestone(?)’. The references in the following nn. 9–10 are from *DNWSI*.

9. Mario Liverani, “*KBD* nei testi amministrativi Ugaritici,” *UF* 2 (1970): 89–108, esp. 100.

10. See Bernard Cutler and John Macdonald, “The Unique Ugaritic Text UT 113 and the Question of ‘Guilds,’” *UF* 9 (1977): 13–30, esp. 22.

11. Gregorio del Olmo Lete and Joaquín Sanmartín, *Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 11.

12. A Middle Assyrian text has *abnu* and *šarpu* occurring in the same phrase: “She must not give to any palace official either gold or silver or precious stones” (*lu ḥurāša lu šarpa u lu abna*); see Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995), 199.

13. On the mission of Ḥananyah see Ingo Kottsieper, “Die Religionspolitik der Achämeniden und die Juden von Elephantine,” in *Religion und Religionskontakte im Zeitalter der Achämeniden*, ed. Reinhard G. Kratz (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser, 2002), 150–78, esp. 154–57. Kottsieper understands Ḥananyah to have been a Persian official, working under the authority of the Persian king, with orders to help organize the religious practice of the Jewish diaspora in Egypt.

The increasing tensions between Jews and Egyptians had to do with the official status conferred upon the religion of the Elephantine Jews. However, the event that triggered the conflict of the autumn of 411 had little to do with religion. Maʿuzyah was detained “on account of one precious stone (tentative translation of *ʾbnsrp*) which they found stolen in the hands of the traders” (A4.3:3–4). Aside from a doubtful occurrence in the Aramaic version of the Bisotun inscription (C2.1:69), the term *rky*ʾ is unique in the Aramaic corpus of the first millennium BCE, but in view of the Hebrew cognate *rōkēl* the translation ‘trader’ is assured.¹⁴ The traders were Jews, as is clear from the rest of the evidence. In Elephantine, it was mostly women who were active as merchants, while commercial agents did the actual trading.¹⁵

The “traders,” then, are the men responsible for the acquisition of the commercial wares, the logistics of their transport, and the selling of the goods with a good margin of profit. The stone had been discovered in their hands. The phrase Maʿuzyah uses is idiomatic. The item “was found stolen in the hand of the traders.” This does not mean they stole the stone themselves, but that they had acquired stolen goods for the purpose of selling. The ingredients of the conflict, then, resided in the theft of a precious object from the Egyptian community, perhaps from one of its temples, its reappearance in the hands of Jewish traders, and the refusal of those traders to part with the item because they had acquired it at an honest price.

Maʿuzyah’s letter implies that the Egyptians had lodged a complaint with the local Persian authorities. Vidranga was commander of the Syenian garrison to which the Jews belonged. As will be clear from letter No. 3 (A3.6), he ordered the detention of the chief trader of the business consortium, one Yaʿuš son of Penūlyah son of Yezanyah. As an additional measure, however, he also proceeded with the arrest of Maʿuzyah. Since Maʿuzyah was the secretary-treasurer of the community, and a member of its presidium, his detention was a way to put pressure on the Jews to be more forthcoming. Maʿuzyah was used as a hostage. The reason the authorities raised the pressure on the Jews had to do with the suspicion that they were hiding something. Were they protecting those who had committed the theft? Or was the stone part of a pile of stolen items that had ended up in possession of the Jews?

Maʿuzyah’s arrest took place in Abydos (A4.3:3). Abydos lies some 330 km downstream from Syene, beyond Thebes; from Abydos, the journey to Memphis is another 510 km. Maʿuzyah does not explain why he found himself in Abydos; this was clear to the people he was writing to. From the fact that he does not specify the identity of the traders, it may be surmised that Maʿuzyah was in fact part of the trading mission as scribe and supervisor. The confiscation of the stone was likely carried out in Abydos. Vidranga had come to Abydos at the instigation of the Egyptians and found that their allegations were true. The Egyptian he came with—one Ḥornufi—could vouch for the identity of the stone. The Jewish traders were indeed shipping the stolen item. Maʿuzyah was guilty by association. Assuming this reconstruction of events is valid, the Jewish community as a whole found itself implicated in the affair, since Maʿuzyah was attached to the temple, the center of the Jewish community.

At the time of writing, Maʿuzyah had been released. His liberation was the outcome of the intervention of two men, Šeḥa and Ḥor. They were Egyptians working as “servants of ‘Anani” (A4.3:4). This ‘Anani was a Jewish scribe (*spr*) working as chancellor (*bʿlʿm*) of the Persian satrap in Memphis. In his capacity as chancellor, he could give orders in the name of Arsames the satrap (see A6.2:23, 411).¹⁶ Apparently, then, news of the accusation against the Jews had reached Memphis. The central Persian authorities had decided that the matter was

14. Compare *DNWSI*, 1076–1077, s.v. *rkl*, ‘merchant’.

15. See the discussion of Letter No. 2 (A3.7) and Porten, *Archives*, 260–61.

16. See for further information, see Porten, *Archives*, 56–57.

too important to be left to the discretion of the local garrison commander. That is why Şeḥa and Ḥor had been dispatched south to conduct an investigation. On their way to Elephantine, they made a stop at Abydos, where they eventually succeeded in convincing Vidranga to let Maʿuzyah go. His imprisonment was premature. The facts of the case had to be established before any sanction could be imposed.

It is not clear whether ʿAnani had a particular responsibility for the Jewish diaspora in Egypt in addition to his normal duties as chancellor of the satrap.¹⁷ But it is more than likely that he would have taken a personal interest in an affair that implicated Jews as suspected perpetrators of a crime. In the eyes of Maʿuzyah at least, ʿAnani was both a friend to the Jews and a high-ranking official who had the ear of the satrap. Once Şeḥa and Ḥor had persuaded Vidranga to release Maʿuzyah, they continued on their journey to Elephantine. At the time Maʿuzyah wrote to the leadership of the community, the two Egyptians were yet to arrive.

The principal purpose of Maʿuzyah’s letter was to urge the community to collaborate. The investigation the servants of ʿAnani were charged to carry out apparently included a search of the houses in the Jewish quarter. That is why Maʿuzyah told his fellow Jews not to be reluctant in bringing their possessions out of their houses: “You, bring out from our houses our possessions; give him whatever your hand finds; this shall not be a loss for you” (A4.3:5–7, 8–9). The central verb here is *ZWL* ‘to bring out’, as is evident from the instructions which Ḥor gave Maʿuzyah: “Send a written order (*ʿgrh*) ahead of me (saying:) ‘[Bri]ng out! For a serious loss there is back-up in the house of ʿAnani’” (A4.3:10).¹⁸ The fact that the two Egyptians were in the service of ʿAnani provided an additional incentive to comply with their demands: “Now whatever you will do for Ḥor, you will be doing for the ch[ancell]or (*lb[ʿl]ʿm*). Ḥor is an assistant of Ḥananyah (error for: ʿAnani)” (A4.3:8). And toward the end of his message Maʿuzyah repeats this argument: “The way you will deal with him (i.e., Ḥor) will not be hidden from ʿAnani” (A4.3:10–11).

THE LETTERS OF HOSEA SON OF NATAN

Letters Nos. 2 and 3, both written by Hosea son of Natan, preceded Maʿuzyah’s letter by a few weeks. Their significance becomes clear in light of what Maʿuzyah wrote later. At the same time, they provide additional information about the context of the events. Hosea sent his letters from Memphis, where he was managing the interests of various Jewish families living at Elephantine. The earliest letter of Hosea son of Natan in our file provides an introduction to the man and his Elephantine clients (A3.7).

¹ To My Lady Şelewah, your servant Hosea. It is we[ll for me here.] May all the gods seek after your welfare at all times. Greetings ² to My Lord Menahem; greetings to My Lady Abihi; gre[etings to N]N and her daughter; greetings to Ta-Ḥnum and Yeho-yiṣmaʿ; greetings to ³ Meşullemet; greetings to Haṣṣul; greetings to [NN and to the . . .] that are upon you (= that you are responsible for); greetings to Kilkeliyah. And now, you sent ⁴ [me a message asking about . . .] Yaʿuṣ said to me: “Sell it for gold.” ⁵ [Address:] To My Lady Şelewah, your servant [Hosea son of Natan.]

17. Ingo Kottsieper argues that ʿAnani indeed combined his duties as chancellor with activity as commissioner for Jewish affairs in Egypt; see “Religionspolitik der Achämeniden,” 165–66.

18. I follow the reconstruction proposed by Kottsieper, “Hebräische, transjordanische und aramäische Briefe,” 361 n. 21: [zw]lw. The meaning of *ZWL* is clarified by its occurrence in B3.6:7, where the contract stipulates that no one has the right to either “brand” a manumitted woman slave as his own property, or “to bring her outside (the household) against money” (*lmzl mndt ksp*). The context makes it clear that *ZWL* implies the transfer of property from the domestic realm to the public sphere or to a new owner. The slave is conceived of as chattel which, transferred out of the house, no longer belongs to the house.

At first glance, this text reads more like the back side of a postcard than as a business letter. The sender heaps greetings upon greetings, using deferential language (“My Lady,” “My Lord,” “your servant”), and saving the only substantial bit of information for the very end of his message, as though it were an afterthought. He has been instructed, so he tells Šelewah, to sell the object for gold. Which object? Tantalizingly, as happens in partial records from the past, this essential piece of information is in the lacunae of the text. “Sell it for gold”: the pronoun refers to a single object. Clearly, it must have been an item of value, for it could not otherwise have been traded (literally: given) for gold.

There is something unusual about the respects Hosea pays—not because he is deferential, but because nearly all of his greetings are addressed to women. The only man is “My Lord Menahem”—apparently the husband of Šelewah, in view of his position in the list of greetings; the other names belong to women.¹⁹ The reason Hosea was paying his respects to these various women follows from the fact that all of them were participants in a local Elephantine business consortium. As mentioned earlier, at Elephantine there were Jewish men who worked as traders, but the clients they worked for were usually women. In his discussion of the Mibṭaḥyah archive, Bezalel Porten has drawn attention to the long tradition in which these Jewish businesswomen stood.²⁰ One instance of a Jewish woman active in business is Aḥuṭab, a central character in the ostraca from the first quarter of the fifth century. The commodities she dealt in were wool,²¹ food,²² salt,²³ timber,²⁴ and hides.²⁵ The case of Mibṭaḥyah illustrates how successful such women could be. At her death, Mibṭaḥyah left an estate consisting of three houses, one female slave, three male slaves, and an unknown quantity of sundry assets.²⁶ Most of the women would be selling relatively modest quantities of local products. They had to join forces to pay for a commercial agent who organized the transportation of their wares to the most profitable marketplace. The usual destination of the cargo was Memphis, capital of Persian Egypt and its main commercial center.

Aside from such exceptional cases as those of Mibṭaḥyah and Aḥuṭab, our knowledge of the women at Elephantine is limited. Especially when it comes to their family connections—filiation, marital status, offspring—there is a dearth of data, due in part to the fact that women never acted as witnesses to contracts. Some of the women Hosea was sending

19. The name Haṣṣul (variant: ʾAṣṣul) could be an exception because it is also borne by men; see Haṣṣul son of Ḥaggay son of Haṣṣul in the list of temple contributions, century of Nabu-ʿAqab; preceded by his brother Mešullam son of Ḥaggai son of Haṣṣul, C3.15:29–30 (400). Their father Ḥaggai son of ʾAṣṣul acted as witness to the wedding document of ʿAnanyah and Yeho-yiṣmaʿ in 420 (B3.8:44); Haṣṣul son of Zekaryah (son of Natan, B2.10:5, 416). For Haṣṣul as a name for women see Haṣṣul daughter of Hodavyah, C3.15:115; ʾAṣṣul daughter Osea son of Qaṣîrî, in Lozachmeur, *Collection Clermont-Ganneau*, 417 no. X4:2.

20. Porten, *Archives*, 260–61.

21. “Let Aḥuṭab bring out (NPQ) wool (ʿmr)” (Cl.-G. 16:8–9 = D7.7:8–9).

22. “Let Aḥuṭab [bring] out for me [food]!” ([lḥm tnp]q ly ʾḥwtb) (Cl.-G. 44:4 = D7.10:4; cf. Cl.-G. 50:3, lḥm).

23. Aḥuṭab is the recipient of a message, Cl.-G. 169 = D7.2, which asks her to send some salt; if there is no salt at home, she is to buy it from the ferryboats.

24. “The timber (ʿq) that I [sent] you through Pa-Min (Egyptian boatman), give it [to Peṭo]siri” (Cl.-G. 228:6–9).

25. “Also, ask for the hide (gldʾ) [which] I mentioned to you. Look, it is your responsibility. Don’t let it go to waste” (Cl.-G. 228:8–10).

26. For convenient access to the Mibṭaḥyah archive, see Porten, *The Elephantine Papyri in English*, 154–202. For her houses, see B2.2 (464), B2.3, and B2.4 (459)—a house given to her by her father on the occasion of her first marriage; B2.10 (416)—a house acquired through her first marriage with the son of Uriyah the priest; B2.7 (446)—a house given to Mibṭaḥyah by her father in return for her material support during his confinement. For Mibṭaḥyah’s slaves see B2.11 (410), a formal document laying down the division of the slaves between the two heirs of Mibṭaḥyah. For an indication of Mibṭaḥyah’s assets, see B2.8 (440) and B2.6 (449), the contract for Mibṭaḥyah’s second marriage.

greetings to can be identified, however. One striking thing about them is their connection to the temple. Šelewah herself was married to Menahem, to be identified with Menahem son of ‘Azaryah, the brother of ‘Anani son of ‘Azaryah.²⁷ Since both ‘Anani and his father ‘Azaryah were temple stewards (*lhn*), there is good reason to assume Menahem served in that capacity as well.²⁸ The fact that he occurs as a recipient in a memorandum of various precious items delivered to the temple increases the plausibility of the hypothesis.²⁹

The presence of Yeho-yišma^c in the list of greetings provides yet another link to the temple. She was the daughter of ‘Anani son of ‘Azaryah, the temple steward (B3.5; B3.7). Mešullemet is another woman with connections to the temple, at least indirectly; she was the sister of the leader of the Jewish community—Yedanyah son of Gemaryah (C3.15:2). Since she was married to Zakkur son of Hosea son of Zakkur (based on C3.15:2–3), she was the sister-in-law of Abihi. There are other family connections between these women. Abihi had married Šelomam son of Hodawyah (B6.3), the brother of Ḥaggus son of Hodo, to whom Hosea son of Natan would write letter No. 5. Haṣṣul was the daughter of Hodawyah (C3.15:114), and thus a sister of Šelomam and Ḥaggus and sister-in-law of Abihi.

Two men were managing the affairs of these women. On the Elephantine side, this was Ya’uš and—perhaps in his absence—his son Pilṭi. Ya’uš and his family lived in the temple quarter, next to one of the houses of Lady Mibṭaḥyah.³⁰ In Memphis, it was Hosea son of Natan who managed the affairs of the business consortium. The women Hosea greets in his letter, then, are his clients; hence his obsequious tone. Ultimately, he works for them—though on a day-to-day basis he takes his instructions from Ya’uš. Hosea’s letter to Šelewah is in response to a question she had asked him. Was it about the precious stone? This is a possible and perhaps tempting conjecture, but the truth is that we do not know. What we do know is that Hosea’s second letter, addressed to Pilṭi son of Ya’uš, refers to recent trouble at Elephantine (A3.6).

¹ To my brother Pilṭi, your brother Hose[a. May the G]od of Heaven seek after [your welfare] at all times. Greetings to Šewa⁷ and his sons. Greetings to Abi[hi. And now,] ² I heard what effort you had to put in (*šm’ṭ k’ml’ zy ‘mlt*)³¹ when [Vidranga stopped the convoy at Abydos]. I went, I and Šeḥa son of Paḥa, and we spoke to Pisina³² and Ar[sames (?)] ³ and he sent a written order (*’grh*) about you to Še<ḥ>a and [. . . . Take ca]re of the children. I am concerned about you (lit.: my heart is torn for you). Everything that [you] are responsible for [. . .]. ⁴ . . . Whatever happens to you there, send word [to me.]³³ ⁵ [Address:] To my brother Pil[ṭi son of Ya’]uš, your brother Hosea son of Natan.

27. Menahem son of ‘Azaryah occurs twice as witness, once to the wedding of his niece Yeho-yišma^c and ‘Ananyah son of Ḥaggai (B3.8:44, 420) and once to a withdrawal document in favor of the two sons of Mibṭaḥyah (B2.9:17, 420).

28. For a reference to ‘Azaryah as temple steward see C3.13:45: *‘zryh lhn’ sgd’ zy* [. . .]; cf. l. 48: *‘zryh lhn’ zy* [. . .]. For the meaning of *lhn*, going back to Akkadian (*a*)*lahḫīnu* (see CAD A/1 294–96, “a kind of temple steward”), see DNWSI, 573 s.v. *lhn*₂ (“certain type of temple servant”) and compare papyrus Amherst 63 viii 12–13: *y’z’r₂q₂’n’ | P^dkr₂w₂ mry. C š^plⁿ | bn<y> + P^rḫ[’]nⁿ | ¹³ OpⁿwhyG m^pP | Pbw₂n[’] | Ḳ.C + mnnhr₂ | d₂[’] + bytlG*, “Let sixty temple stewards sprinkle the stela of Mar, their palms full of frankincense for the nostrils of Bethel.”

29. Menahem was the recipient of over twenty vessels according to a memorandum compiled after 411; see C3.13:10–19.

30. Ya’uš son of Penūyah (b. Yezanyah) was from a scribal family and lived in a house next to Lady Mibṭaḥyah (formerly the house of her father, formerly of Mešullam son of Zakkur son of Ḳaṭer) in the temple quarter; see B2.7:13 (446).

31. For this translation, see Takamitsu Muraoka and Bezalel Porten, *A Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic*, 2nd rev. ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 273.

32. See Muraoka and Porten, *A Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic*, 159 n. 739.

33. Read: *mh z’ mlh zykh tnh⁵ šlh* [‘ly].

Hosea sent his letter from Memphis; it was the city where he resided as commercial agent. Having been informed about the aborted commercial transport to Memphis, Hosea went to the Persian judge Pisina (and possibly the satrap himself, Arsames).³⁴ Šeḥa son of Paḥa had come with him. This was the same man whom Maʿuzyah referred to in his letter, a servant of ʿAnani and a colleague of Ḥor. As a result of their meeting, the judge (or the satrap) sent Šeḥa a written message (*ʿgrh*). The “epistle” Šeḥa received must have been a formal order to conduct an investigation at Elephantine and also served as a search warrant. The effect of Hosea’s intervention with Pisina, then, was a transfer of responsibility from the local to the central authorities. Pursuant to the instruction of the judge, Šeḥa and Ḥor had embarked upon their mission. As we know from Maʿuzyah’s letter, the garrison commander of Syene came around to the fact that the matter of the stolen stone would be dealt with by higher powers.

Normally, Hosea son of Natan would correspond with his colleague Yaʿuš. The fact that he wrote to the latter’s son Pilṭi instead indicates that Yaʿuš was unavailable. Had he gone with the commercial transport to Memphis? And had he been arrested in Abydos along with Maʿuzyah? It is clear from Hosea’s letter that the burden of responsibility had now fallen on the shoulders of Pilṭi. Hosea’s letter is full of sympathy and concern. Understandably so—once the affair of the stolen stone had become public, Pilṭi must have had to deal with anger on the side of the Egyptians and with aggressive inquiries from the local Persian authorities. In the absence of the paterfamilias, it now was up to Pilṭi to take care of the children. The outcome of the affair was still pending; hence Hosea’s request to be kept abreast of developments in Elephantine.

A study of the physical appearance of Hosea’s two letters, the one to Šelewah and the other to Pilṭi, shows striking similarities. They have exactly the same format, as though the pieces of papyrus they were written on came from the same scroll. Both messages are of about the same length. They are relatively brief. There is a distinct possibility that they were dispatched to Elephantine through the same courier, meaning that they were sent at the same time. Normally, for reasons of efficiency,³⁵ a messenger would carry a batch of messages, not necessarily from the same sender. Assuming that Hosea did send the letters to Šelewah and to Pilṭi at the same time, there is a distinct likelihood that he was writing to Šelewah in response to a question about the precious stone. Apparently, word had reached the Jewish community at Elephantine that something had gone awry with the shipment. The clients are worried, as a result of which they make inquiries with their commercial agents, both in Elephantine and in Memphis.

The two remaining letters of Hosea son of Natan (No. 4 and No. 5 in our file) can be dated with some precision. The first was written in response to letters from the Jewish leadership that had reached Memphis on the 6th of Paopi, roughly corresponding to the 20th of January (A4.2:15). The second was dispatched from Memphis on the 27th of Tybi, roughly corresponding to the 10th of May (A3.8:14). The name of the author of the first letter is lost in the lacunae of the text; the best we can do is to make an informed guess. Since we know how intimately involved Hosea son of Natan, the Jewish representative in Memphis, was in the affair of the stolen stone, he qualifies as the most likely sender. It was either him or someone from his entourage.³⁶

34. The reference to Arsames is uncertain but possible, reading *lpysn wʾr[šm]*.

35. The Hermopolis letters provide an illustration of the practice: The eight papyri were letters sent by Aramaean soldiers stationed in Memphis to family in Syene (A2.1–4; D1.1) and Thebes (A2.5–7). The letters never reached their destination since for reasons unknown the courier that carried them left them halfway.

36. For recent treatments of this letter, see Joisten-Pruschke, *Das religiöse Leben der Juden von Elephantine*, 162–67; Porten, *The Elephantine Papyri in English*, 128–30; Rohmoser, *Götter, Tempel und Kult*, 386–88.

¹ To my lords Yedanyah, Maʿuzyah, ʾUriyah, and the garrison: your servan[t Hosea son of Natan. May all the gods] ² seek after [the well-being of my lords] at all times. All is well for us here. And now, every day that [they are investigating, NN] ³ has been complaining with our investigator, a certain Zivaka. And he complained with an[other] investigator. [So far all blame in the matter] ⁴ is with us because the Egyptians are giving them bribes. And since [the investigation began, the agents] of the Egyptians [have pledged their loyalty] ⁵ before Arsames, but they are acting like thieves. Also [there is a new administrator] ⁶ of the province of Thebes (*mdynt nʾ*). And they are saying: “Mazda-yazna is the provincial administrator (*pēqīd lmdynʾ*). [He is responsible for the rest of the investigation.]” ⁷ We are afraid because we are (now) smaller (in number) by two. And now, behold, they are favoring [the Egyptians ever since Arsames left Egypt.] ⁸ If only we had shown ourselves to Arsames before, then it would not have been like this [for us. Now no one, neither we nor anyone else.] ⁹ will plead our cause (lit.: say our matters) before Arsames. Pisina is appealing us; [by means of a few gifts we might change our situation. Now, whatever] ¹⁰ you (pl.) can find—honey, castor oil, strings, ropes, tanned skins, boards—[do send it as gifts to us here because] ¹¹ they are full of anger against you (pl., *mlyn lbtkm*). Passu son of Mannuki came to Memphis and broug[ht . . .] ¹² and the investigator. And he gave me twelve staters of silver³⁷ and [I am] happy with it. [. . . which] ¹³ Ḥori gave me when they put him in custody (*klwhy*) on account of (ʿ*t*) the pitcher/jar (*kdʾ*). Tiri[.] gave orders [to arrest Şeḥa and Ḥori] ¹⁴ by order of the King. And they are detaining (*wklyn*) them (*lhn*). And the indemnification (*nzq*) for Arsames and the ransom (*kpr*) for Şeḥa [and Ḥori, I shall pay it—both the indemnification and the ransom for Şeḥa] ¹⁵ and Ḥori whom they put in detention. The 6th of the month Paopi [ca. January 20] the letters arrived [here. Do not worry about anything.] ¹⁶ We will take care of the matter. ¹⁷ [Address:] To my lords Yedanyah; Maʿuzyah: your [servant Hosea son of Natan.]

The use of square brackets in the translation of this letter is almost too subtle an indication of the damaged state of the papyrus—in fact, fifty percent of it is lost. For all the lines, only the first part is preserved. On the basis of what remains, we must reconstruct the other half of the letter. Albert Schweitzer used to say that there is such redundancy in books that he could easily skip every other page and nevertheless follow the argument without any difficulty. It would be misleading to entertain a similar degree of confidence with respect to fragmentary texts from antiquity. And yet we have to tentatively restore the relatively long interruptions in Hosea’s message if we are to make any sense of it.

Some elements of the situation he describes are clear from the preserved parts of the text. There is a conflict between Egyptian and Jews, with the Persians in the role of arbitrators. The Egyptians are at an advantage because they have been lavishing ‘bribes’ (*šḥd*) on the Persian officials. Şeḥa and Ḥori, the two Egyptians who had successfully intervened to liberate Maʿuzyah, are now in fetters, so the Jewish delegation feels as though it is now “smaller by two.” There is a ‘ransom’ (*kpr*) to be paid for their release, in addition to the ‘indemnification’ (*nzq*) due to Arsames.

A crucial phrase for understanding the situation is found at l. 8: “If only we had shown ourselves to Arsames before, then it would not have been like this [for us.]” For some reason, Hosea and his companion (“we”) have been unable to talk to the satrap in person. This was apparently a question of timing. They should have visited the satrap ‘before’ (*qdmn*). “Before” what? Before things got out of hand? Before the Egyptians seized the occasion to plead their case before Arsames? Or before something occurred of such a nature that it was no longer possible to see Arsames?

The petition for support from the Judean governor, known to us in two drafts, indicates that Arsames had left Egypt by the summer of 410 (A4.7:4–5//A4.8:4; see also A4.5:2–3).

37. The Greek stater was the equivalent of two shekels; see Porten, *Archives*, 64.

This departure, so the Elephantine Jews intimate, left them unprotected, since Arsames had traditionally taken a favorable view of the Jewish cause. Such is also the meaning of Hosea's complaint: "If only we had shown ourselves to Arsames before . . ."—meaning, he would have supported us, and none of this would have happened. After Arsames had left Egypt for Persia, he maintained contact with his satrapy through letters. In two of those letters Arsames refers to the time "when Egypt rebelled" (*kzy mšryn mrdt*, A6.7:6), "when the Egyptians rebelled" (*kzy mšry' mrdw*, A6.10:1; see also the twofold reference to "the turmoil in Egypt," in A6.11:1–2, 4).³⁸ This rebellion occurred in the summer of 410, as is clear from a very similar phrase in the description of the circumstances under which the temple destruction at Elephantine took place: "The detachments of the Egyptians rebelled (*dglñ zy mšry' mrdw*), but we did not abandon our posts, and nothing damaging was found in us" (A4.5:1–2). In the preserved correspondence of Arsames, the letter with the reference to the rebellion is not the earliest one. When the rebellion occurred, therefore, Arsames must have been away for some time; he would hardly have left Egypt if he had seen the rebellion coming. Hosea son of Natan refers to letters that reached Memphis around January 20. If the year is 410—year 13 of Darius, his fourteenth year beginning in spring—then Arsames must have left Egypt by the end of 411 or the beginning of 410.

We know that Arsames's departure from Egypt coincided with a reshuffling of the Persian administration in Egypt. One significant change for the Jews was the promotion of Vidranga to the post of governor (*frataraka*; see A4.5:4; A4.7:5//A4.8:5) and of his son Naphaina to the post of garrison commander (A4.7:7//A4.8:6), the very position in which Vidranga had served for at least ten years (B2.9:4–5). The Arsames letters reflect a number of other new appointments as well.³⁹ This may well have been the background to the reference to Mazdayazna as the 'official' (*pqyd*) of the province of Thebes. The "Province of Thebes" (see also C3.14:35; D3.19:7) and the "[Province] of Tshetres" (C3.14:38, [*mdynt t]šštrs*) are two names for the same administrative unit, the Southern Province, also referred to as "the Province" (B3.13:11; C3.19:14).⁴⁰ The twin cities of Syene and Elephantine belonged to the Southern Province, and the appointment of a new Persian official meant that the Jews had to deal with a new man. It was the new appointee, apparently, to whom the remainder of the case of the stolen stone had been entrusted.

The absence of Arsames and the changes in the Persian administration of Egypt proved to be a major setback for the Jews. The circumstances had changed to their disadvantage. The fact that Šeḥa and Ḥor, back in Memphis from their mission in Elephantine, have been put in fetters is significant for the new political climate. Whatever the precise cause of their detention ("on account of the pitcher"), it is indicative of a fall from grace. One of the men who succeeded in maintaining their position is Judge Pisina. From the evidence of Hosea's earlier letters, Pisina had always taken the side of the Jews in the matter of the stolen stone. Apparently, he was still inclined to do so, but he was powerless to bring about a change. The best advice he could give was for the Jews to be more forthcoming with gifts for the Persian officials they had to deal with.

38. The Aramaic term *ywz*, 'turmoil, insurrection', is a calque upon the Persian; see Tavernier, *Iranica in the Achaemenid Period*, 452 under no. 4.4.16.6. The word is also found in a completely damaged context in D6.12g:1.

39. See A6.4: Psamšek succeeds his father Aḥḥapi as 'official' (*pēqid*); A6.9: Naḥṯor is appointed as new *pēqid*.

40. See also Porten, *Archives from Elephantine*, 43: "It is likely that the two terms in the Aramaic papyri, 'province of Thebes' and 'province of Tshetres', usually taken as two distinct administrative districts, are actually synonymous."

About three months later, Hosea son of Natan wrote another letter, this one addressed to someone whose name does not occur elsewhere in the papyri, Ḥaggus the son of Hodo (A3.8):⁴¹

¹ [To my brother Ḥagg]us: your brother H[os]ea. I send you many (wishes of) well-being and strength. [And now, . . .] ² [We went to Pi]sina the judge and we paid him cash (lit. “in his hand”) ten karsh of silver, plus one karsh [in addition. But he requested another five karsh.] ³ [The money was not] in my hand [so] that I find myself de[tained fo]r five karsh of silver.⁴² And now, [take this letter] ⁴ with you, that you might be given five karsh of silver. And write them a debt acknowledgement for it. And if [they] don’t [lend] all the silver ⁵ against interest, and if they don’t give it to you, saying: “Give a security,” sell the house of Zakkur and the house of Ashan. And if they don’t buy ⁶ them, look for a man who will buy the big house of Hodo and sell it to him for the sum (lit. “the silver”) that it will go for (lit. “that will stand for it”). And when ⁷ this letter reaches you, do not delay, come down to Memphis at once. If you find the money come down at once,⁸ and if you don’t find any, come down at once. Go to Bethel-taden and let him give you [one] linen tunic, one *wasah*-garment,⁹ one woolen . . . tunic, one *pa’aqas*, one *saḥalaš* of dyed . . . , [one] ca. seven . . . ,¹⁰ one used tunic. And when he gives them to you, send word to me, and if he does not give them to you, send word to me [too]. Now ¹¹ if you come down to Memphis alone, do not leave Ashan [without suppl]ies. Give him grain so that you [do] not [sin.] ¹² When the Jews bring them in before [. . .] . . . I have been abandoned [. . .] ¹³ their words. Do not delay. Come down at once, and bring down with you at once for me one tunic for [. . .] ¹⁴ to bring to me. Written on the 27th of Tybi [= ca. May 10th]. ¹⁵ [(Address:) To my] bro[ther] Ḥaggus son of Hodo, your brother H[osea son of Natan].

About three months have elapsed between Hosea’s letter to the Jewish leadership at Elephantine and his writing this letter to Ḥaggus son of Hodo. Judging by the tone of concern and urgency, matters in Memphis have become critical. Hosea and his unnamed companion have gone once again to Judge Pisina. They paid the judge an amount of ten karsh, and perhaps one additional karsh. But from what follows it is clear that the judge wanted more. Hosea is in urgent need of the sum of five karsh. The urgency derives from the fact that the judge had put Hosea in prison as a means to make him pay—confinement for debt was not unusual. The reading of l. 3 is conjectural, but it does tally with some aspects of the letter that would otherwise make little sense. The main thrust of the letter is that Ḥaggus should do everything in his power to raise five karsh of silver. A simple loan against interest would be best, but if necessary, he should give two houses as security. And if worst comes to worse, he is to sell the big house of his own father for any acceptable offer.

But Hosea is also asking for clothes. Ḥaggus is to go to one Bethel-taden, who must supply him with a variety of garments. Many of the names of these garments defy interpretation, but it should be noted that Hosea is asking for one piece of each—with the exception of seven pieces of one particular item. If Hosea had been ordering clothes for a commercial purpose, as commentators have speculated, why should he be content with such a modest supply?⁴³ Hosea needed clothes for himself. That is why Ḥaggus, in case Bethel-taden does not give him the requested articles, should bring at least one tunic (l. 13). Hosea fears for the future: “I have been abandoned.”

Since Hosea son of Natan acted as witness to a house bequest in 404 (B3.10:24), we know that he eventually survived his trials (see also C3.15:7, 400). But at the time he was writing to

41. For a recent treatment of this letter see Porten, *The Elephantine Papyri in English*, 111–13.

42. Translation based on the following reconstruction of l. 3: [ksp lʾ] bydy [k]zy h[š]kht k[lyʾ] ʿbʾksp kršn IIIII.

43. For the view according to which the clothes were meant to be sold in Memphis, see Pierre Grelot, *Documents araméens d’Égypte* (Paris: Cerf, 1972), 132.

Ḥaggus, he was desperate. In his other letters, Hosea had been keeping up appearances; this letter is more candid. The name of the man whose help he is soliciting does not occur elsewhere in the papyri. In view of the name of his father (Hodo being the abbreviated form of Hodawyah), Ḥaggus was the brother of Šelomam. This Šelomam was married to Abihi (the “Lady Abihi” who was one of Hosea’s clients), the daughter of Hosea son of Zakkur, sister of Zakkur son of Hosea son of Zakkur.⁴⁴ Perhaps the “house of Zakkur” that Hosea mentions as security belonged to that branch of Ḥaggus’s family. Ashan is a complete unknown, but he, too, seems to have been a member of the family, since Ḥaggus is responsible for his food supply. It is clear from Hosea’s various requests that there was a special bond between him and Ḥaggus. Otherwise, how would he have dared to ask Ḥaggus to sell the house of his own father? Since the assistance Hosea is asking for is much more than might be expected from a mere colleague, Ḥaggus and Hosea presumably belonged to the same family. If so, they must have been in-laws, the one having married the sister of the other. However, the data at our disposal do not allow us to go beyond the realm of conjecture.

THE ARRESTS IN ELEPHANTINE AND THEBES

At this point it is necessary to bring in the final letter in our file, even if there is one significant element in Hosea’s letter to Ḥaggus that needs to be discussed in more detail: its reference to “the Jews.” But that discussion is best postponed until letter No. 6 in the affair of the stolen stone has been treated, since it provides a context for Hosea’s reference to “the Jews.” This final letter was written by Yislaḥ son of Natan (A4.4 = Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri*, nos. 56 + 34).⁴⁵ Who was the addressee? Only the name of his father has been preserved. In view of the situation in Elephantine, and because of family connections, the recipient is best identified as Yislaḥ son of Gaddul son of Yigdal. He belonged to a family of scribes, associated with the Yaho temple, and he was the paternal uncle of Yislaḥ son of Natan. In the absence of the Jewish leadership, Yislaḥ son of Gaddul qualified as a good second best, since he had close connections with the temple and he was family, too.

¹ [To my brother Yislaḥ son of Gaddul, your brother Yislaḥ son of Natan. It is well with me here.] May the gods seek after your well-being at all times. And now, [. . .] ² [. . . . N]N son of N[N] went to Syene. And he did [. . .] to the Jew[s][. . .] ³ [. . . . And these are the names of the men w]ho have been taken prisoner in Elephantine:

Berekyah,

Hosea,

[NN son of NN],

⁴ [NN son of NN],

[NN son of] Pa-Ḥnum.

And these are the names of the women who were apprehended in the gate] ⁵ [in Thebes, and who were taken prisoner:

Rami the wife of Hodo,

Isireshwet the wife of Hosea,

44. For the marriage between Šelomam son of Hodawyah and Abihi, see B6.3 (ca. 430). For the ancestry of Abihi, see C3.15:93 (daughter of Hosea); her father is to be identified with Hosea son of Zakkur mentioned in D6.1. For Zakkur son of Hosea son of Zakkur, see C3.15:3, where he is linked with Mešullemet daughter of Gemaryah son of Maḥseyah, sister of the leader of the Jewish community and presumably the wife of Zakkur son of Hosea son of Zakkur. Zakkur, brother of Abihi, was presumably the first witness to her marriage with Šelomam; see B6.3:13.

45. For recent treatments of this letter see Lindenberger, *Letters*, 68–70 no. 32; Porten, “Report on Imprisonment of Jewish Leaders,” *COS* 3.121–22; Porten, *The Elephantine Papyri in English*, 134–35; Rohrmoser, *Götter, Tempel und Kult*, 391–93. [Addendum: Caryn Tamber-Rosenau, “Female Diplomats in Jewish Elephantine?” *JSOT* 40 (2016): 491–510; Bob Becking, “Burglars, Diplomats, or Victims?” *ZABR* 23 (2017): 223–28.]

Pallul the wife of Yislah,
 Ra'iya [the wife of NN],
⁶ Tabla' the daughter of Mešullam,
 Qaw(i)la' her sister.

Here are the names of the men who were apprehended in the gate in Thebes and who were taken [prisoner:]

⁷ Yedanyah the son of Gemaryah,
 Hosea the son of Yatom,
 Hosea the son of Nattum (= Nattun),
 Ḥaggai his brother,
 Aḥyo the son of Mikayah.

[The investigators have left] ⁸ the houses that they had entered in Elephantine. And the possessions which they confiscated (lit. "took") they shall certainly return to their owners. However, they fined their owners (an amount of) ⁹ 120 karsh of silver. Hopefully there will not be another decree for them here. Greetings to your house(hold) and to your children until the gods show me [your face in peace.] ¹⁰ [(Address:) To my brother Yislah son] of Gaddul, your brother Yislah son of Natan.

In his report, Yislah son of Natan focuses on the names of the Jews who have been arrested. These arrests occurred in connection with what is best described as a second investigation in the matter of the stolen stone.⁴⁶ This time, the Persians did not leave the matter to Egyptian officials. The name of the man who went to Syene is in the lacunae of the text. Several reconstructions are possible; none of them is certain. The Persian investigators entered the houses of the Jews and confiscated their possessions, while the inhabitants were temporarily evicted. By the time Yislah wrote his report, the investigators had left the houses, and the confiscated goods would have been returned to their owners. But in the course of the proceedings, several men and women had been arrested. Yislah distinguishes three groups: men who have been taken prisoner in Elephantine, women who were apprehended "in the gate in Thebes" and arrested, and men who were apprehended "in the gate in Thebes" and arrested. The reference to the gate of Thebes—point of entry, point of exit—suggests that Yislah son of Natan wrote from Thebes, seat of the official of the Southern Province.

Most of the names of the men arrested in Elephantine are lost to us because of the sorry state of the papyrus. The names of the women and the men "apprehended in the gate in Thebes," on the other hand, are nearly completely preserved. Many of those names are familiar because they belong to leading members of the Jewish community: the president Yedanyah son of Gemaryah, Hosea son of Yatom,⁴⁷ Hosea son of Nattun and his brother Ḥaggay,⁴⁸ and Aḥyo son of Mikayah.⁴⁹ Unfortunately, the names of the women are less informative. Rami wife of Hodo was presumably the mother of Ḥaggus and the mother-in-law of Lady Abihi, but the identity of the other women is guesswork. They were not married to the men mentioned as prisoners, with the possible exception of Isireshwet, wife of Hosea.

Yislah son of Natan reports the arrests, but he does not elaborate upon the grounds for the detention of the Jews nor does he explain why the most significant arrests were made in

46. L. 2 reads: "he went to Syene w'bd lyhwd[y] . . ."

47. According to A4.10:4, Hosea son of Yatom was one of the five Jews offering a substantial bribe to the Persian authorities if they would allow the reconstruction of the temple. For other mentions of Hosea son of Yatom, see B3.5:24 (witness in 434), C4.4:3 (in list of names, ca. 410), and B3.10:23–24 (witness in 407).

48. According to A4.10:5, Hosea son of Nattun was also one of the five Jews offering a substantial bribe to the Persian authorities. See also D3:17 (list of names) and C3.15:50 (listed as contributor to the temple, 400). For his brother Ḥaggay son of Nattun see C4.4:1.

49. Full lineage: Aḥyo son of Mikaya son of Aḥyo son of Gemaryah.

Thebes. As far as the grounds for the arrests are concerned, there is no mystery. Detention of influential members of the Jewish community was a way to coerce them into collaborating with the Persian authorities, which in this particular instance would have resulted in the extradition of those who had received the stolen stone plus any additional items.

The answer to the second question—why were they apprehended in Thebes?—is less obvious. There are two possibilities: first, these women and men were on the run, trying to escape the violence in Elephantine; or second, they had left Elephantine on a mission to the Persian authorities, either in Thebes or in Memphis. The flight hypothesis is inherently unlikely, all the more so because the women and the men are apparently not linked by filiation or marriage. The hypothesis of an official mission is far more plausible. This would mean that the leadership of the Jewish community had decided to take matters into its own hands—they would personally settle the matter with the Persians, together with the women who were involved in the trading corporation responsible for the shipment of the precious stone.

The hypothesis of an official mission by the Jewish leadership finds confirmation in Hosea's letter to Ḥaggus. The urgency that pervades Hosea's messages has two causes. One is the fact of his confinement. But there is another reason for his anxiety. In the last lines of his petition for help, Hosea mentions the Jews: "When the Jews will bring them before [. . .]" (A3.8:12). This use of the term "Jews" is striking since, technically speaking, Hosea is himself a Jew. If the reference were merely to ethnicity, he might have spoken about "our brothers."

In the Aramaic documents from Elephantine, "the Jews" is the expression used to designate the Jewish community at Elephantine, and more especially its leadership. "The Jews" (*yhwdy*' = *yēhūdāyē*) and "the Jewish garrison" (*hyl*' *yhwdy*' = *ḥaylā*' *yēhūdāyā*') are designations referring to the same reality, the former being the less formal equivalent of the latter.⁵⁰ Speaking of "the Jews," Hosea is therefore referring more especially to the leadership of the Jewish community. He knows that they are coming, and that they will bring "them" before the Persian authorities. Due to the breaks in the last part of Hosea's message, it is unknown before whom exactly the Jews will bring them, but the general drift is clear. Whom or what the Jews were going to bring must have been clear to both the sender and the recipient of his message, but we don't know. For Hosea son of Natan, the prospect of the Jews coming was not at all reassuring, it would seem. He feels abandoned and urges Ḥaggus to come down as soon as possible—with or without the money, with or without the clothes, with or without Ashan. It is as though Hosea feared that the declarations the Jewish leaders were going to make ("their words," A3.8:13) would be incriminating for him.

In view of the letter of Yislaḥ son of Natan to Yislaḥ son of Gaddul, the Jewish leadership did eventually reach a settlement with the authorities in Thebes. The Persians condemned the community to a heavy fine of 120 karsh. "Hopefully there will not be another decree for

50. For *yhwdy*' = *yēhūdāyē*, see A4.3:12 (ca. 411); A4.7:22, 26//A4.8:21–22, 26 (407); for *hyl*' *yhwdy*' = *ḥaylā*' *yēhūdāyā*', see A4.1:1, 10 (419); C3.15:1 (400). Note also the more colloquial use of "the garrison" (*hyl*') to refer to the Jewish community in A4.2:1 (ca. 411). For the synonymous parallelism between the two expressions, compare A4.2:1 ("to my lords Yedanyah, Ma'uzyah, Uriyah, and the garrison") with A4.3:12 ("to my lords Yedanyah, Uriyah, and the Jews"). Note that the expression "the Jews" occurs only a few times in the ostraca, usually dated to the first quarter of the fifth century; see Cl.-G. 135:6, 7 (*yhwdy*', 2x, with reference to their relations with the Caspian community in Elephantine); Cl.-G. 182:3; Lozachmeur, *La collection Clermont-Ganneau*, 421, no. X11: "These are the Jews (*?lh yhwdy*') who received *prs*: Mikaya (*mky*) son of Gemaryah, Yedanyah son of Mikayah (*mkyh*), 'Ananyah son of Hosea, [NN] son of Šelomam. . . ."

them here” (A4.4:9). Does this mean that the matter had been settled to the satisfaction of all concerned? That is hard to believe. Did the Egyptians feel they had been given satisfaction?

Yislah’s report to Yislah is the final piece in the file of the missing stone. There were some loose ends—goods to be returned to their owners, a fine of 120 karsh to be paid—but otherwise the case seemed officially closed. And since Hosea son of Natan appeared some years later as witness to an Elephantine marriage, all seems to have ended well for him, too. Hosea wrote his letter for help around May 20, 410, and Yislah’s report can be dated to June 410. Yislah was expecting that now everything would return to normal. Many others might have entertained similar hopes, but they were on the eve of a summer that would prove them terribly wrong.