

# The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the  
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

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VOL. XXIII. (No. I.)

JANUARY, 1909.

NO. 632.

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CHICAGO

**The Open Court Publishing Company**

LONDON: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd.

Per copy, 10 cents (sixpence). Yearly, \$1.00 (in the U.P.U., 5s. 6d.).

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Entered as Second-Class Matter March 26, 1897, at the Post Office at Chicago, Ill. under Act of March 3, 1879.  
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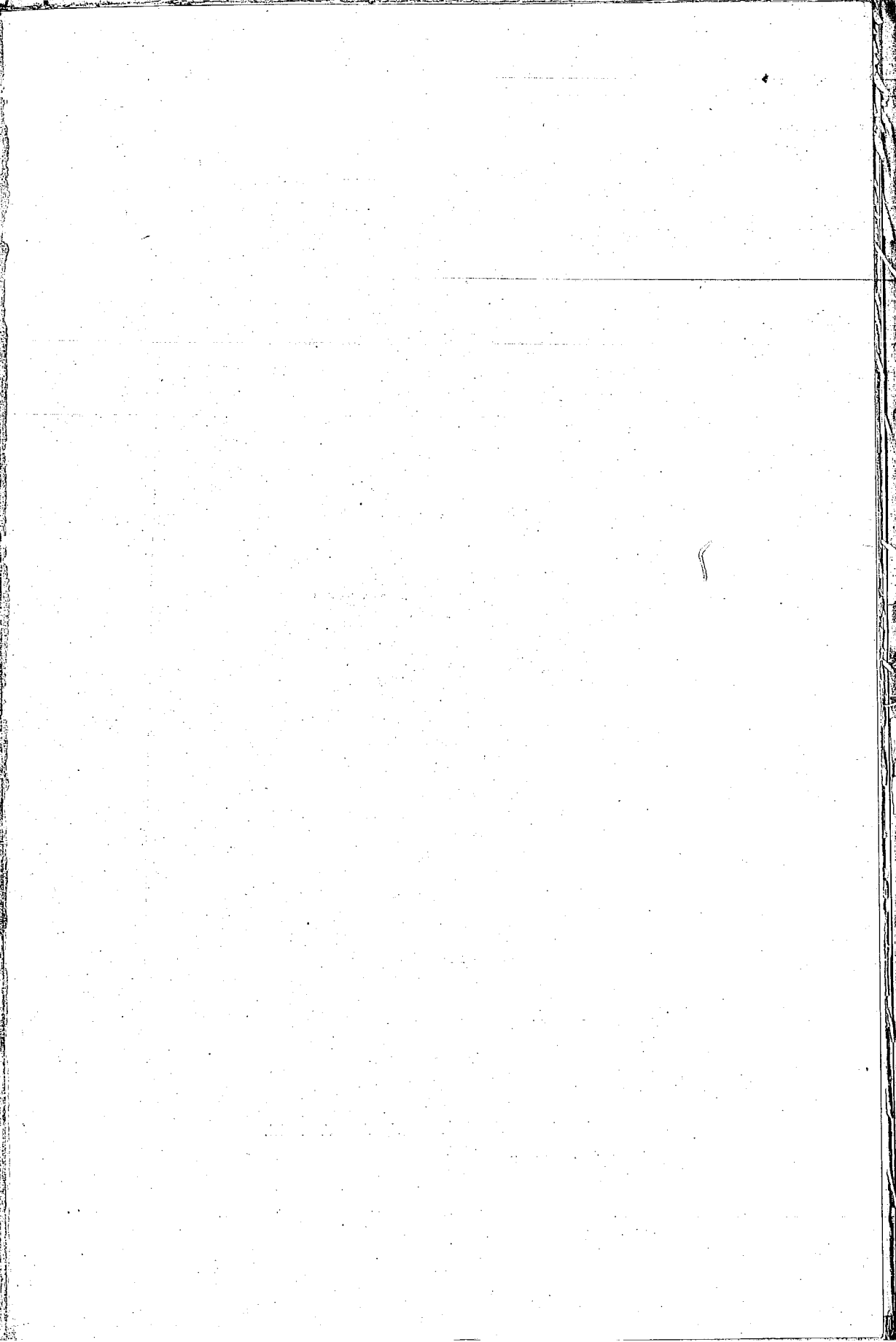
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THE SEMITIC GOD OF TAHPANHES.

*Frontispiece to The Open Court.*

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## THE SEMITIC GOD OF TAH-PÄNHES.

PROBABLY AN ANCIENT RELIEF OF YAHVEH.

BY PROF. W. MAX MÜLLER, PH.D.

IN the autumn of 1907 a great sensation was caused by the discovery of the Aramaic papyri at Assuan, which gave, for the first time, full details about the temple of Yahveh built by the large Jewish colony on the frontier-island Elephantine.<sup>1</sup> The first batch of Assuan papyri, previously published by Sayce and Cowley, had mentioned a "chapel (*agûrâ*) of Yahveh" on Elephantine, to the great surprise of scholars, but more recent discoveries disclosed the fact that this "chapel" was a fine sanctuary of not inconsiderable size, equipped in a very sumptuous way. The Jews describe it as possessing stone pillars and "five gates built of hewn stones," the walls ornamented with alabaster-slabs and brass nails, the ceiling of cedar planks, the sacrificial vessels of gold and silver. This magnificent sanctuary, destroyed by the Egyptians, (owing to the jealousy of the priests of Khnûm or Khnûb, as the Jews claim) in the year 14 of Darius II (404 B. C.), already existed before the Persian conquest in 525 B. C., "in the days of the kings of Egypt"; and Cambyses, "when he entered Egypt and destroyed all temples of the gods of Egypt," did not touch it. The Jews state, when writing to the Persian governor, that during the conquest of Cambyses "in that temple nobody ruined anything." Susprising as the existence of such an elaborate cult on the frontier of Nubia appeared to most scholars, yet it was in perfect agreement with Biblical statements. Did not Isaiah (xix. 18 ff.) joyfully predict the worship

<sup>1</sup> See Sachau, "Aramäische Papyrusurkunden aus Elephantine," *Transactions of the Berlin Academy*, 1907. Compare also "Yedonya's Letter Concerning the Yahu Temple," in *The Open Court*, of June, 1908, and Mr. Kampmeier's review of an article by Gunkel in the same number.

of Yahveh, not only in "five cities in the land of Egypt" which "shall speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the Lord of Hosts," but throughout Egypt, so that "in that day shall there be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the Lord" (verse 19)? He seems to have been acquainted with some existent Jewish cults on Egyptian soil, similar to that temple at Elephantine or to the Jewish sanctuary at Leontopolis. The latter, according to Josephus, had been erected by Onias, in the time of Ptolemy VI, Philometor (c. 155 B. C.), and of Judas Maccabæus. Recent critics, considering the temple of Leontopolis as an unprecedented late heresy, often suspected the antiquity of Isaiah xix. 18 ff., and saw in this passage a contemporary allusion to that heresy. This theory is now completely set aside by the Elephantine papyri. Such cults are shown to have existed in very ancient times and to have been more frequent. Onias simply followed early precedents when he established a sanctuary of Yahveh. We may only question whether his bold economy in rebuilding a ruined temple of the Egyptian divinity Sokhmet,<sup>2</sup> the lion-headed, for his temple had any earlier parallels. This shows, indeed, a surprising freedom from scruples with regard to the Jewish laws of purity, but the Egyptian Jews always seem to have been more emancipated and less orthodox than their coreligionists in any part of the world. The literature of the Alexandrian Jews shows this clearly enough. The ordinary Bible reader who is accustomed only to the strict orthodoxy of Judea as represented in the canonical books, must be shocked by this heretical liberalism and view it with the same suspicion and dislike as did the Jerusalemite orthodoxy, at least in a later, stricter time. The total disregard of the claim that Mount Zion was the only place to worship the Lord, is the acme of heresy from that standpoint.

Now I believe, I can add another instance of this liberalism, an instance remarkable in various ways.

In the summer of 1904, while studying the rich collections of the great Egyptian museum, at that time just transferred from Gizeh to the new building at Cairo, my interest was aroused by a limestone stèle with a very unusual representation of a worshiping scene from a Semitic temple, in a style which is pronouncedly late Babylonian

<sup>2</sup> Josephus uses the name "wild Bubastis." The Egyptian texts, comparing and identifying the cat-headed Bubastis and the lion-headed Sokhmet, state that the first is the beneficent aspect of the latter, which they explain as the warlike, fierce manifestation of Bubastis. The name Leontopolis confirms that Sokhmet (a name erroneously read Sekhet by earlier Egyptologists) was meant.

(6th century B. C.), notwithstanding some Egyptian influences. The place where it had been discovered, according to the accounts of the amiable conservator, Mr. Daressy, added much to the interest of this curious monument. It was found at Tell Defenneh, the locality identified with the Biblical Tahpanhes even before Petrie's excavations. I photographed the stele and published it, as Plate 40 of my *Egyptological Researches* (Washington, 1906; publication 53 of the Carnegie Institution of Washington.) The liberality of the Carnegie Institution allowed me to give an especially good reproduction in heliotype of that precious stele; it is reproduced here with the permission of the Institution.

The chief interest of the representation, as I have said above, lies in the locality. Tell Defenneh (or Defneh? Petrie, *Ten Years Digging*, p. 50), is a place situated in the extreme northeast of the Delta, southeast of Tanis, on the ancient Pelusiac branch of the Nile and the great caravan road to Syria. At this important spot, guarding the entrance into Egypt, the kings of the twenty-sixth dynasty erected forts and located a strong garrison of mercenaries from Greece and Asia Minor. The quarter occupied by these foreign soldiers was explored by Petrie; the other parts, not yet touched by his spade, must have contained the civilian quarter, especially of the foreign merchants who had settled in this frontier town because of its great facilities for commerce with Asia. The identification of Defenneh with Daphnæ of the Greeks and the Biblical Tahpanhes, an identification which has no direct epigraphic evidence but has been admitted by all Egyptologists, agrees excellently with the fact that Tahpanhes, according to Jer. xliii. 7; xlv. 1; xlv. 14, was one of the places where the Jews had flocked in great numbers when fleeing to Egypt before the Chaldæans. Always gaining their livelihood principally by trading, they had to seek places of a similarly advantageous character for their settlements.

On page 30 of the above-mentioned publication, I called the god represented on the stele "the local Semitic god of the Biblical Tahpanhes" and left the determination of his name and functions as much as possible undecided. Recently, the question has more and more come to my mind, whether we may not venture to determine the identity of the god after the only fact which we know about the non-military foreign population of Tahpanhes, namely its strongly Jewish character. True, we may assume that, together with the Jews, there was, as I expressed it, "a similarly considerable colony of Phœnicians, Aramæans, etc." (*loc. cit.* p. 30) and so leave the whole Syrian pantheon open for comparison with that unknown

god. However, on the other hand, it is not quite certain that the Jewish quarter of Tahpanhes corresponded to similar colonies of other Syrian nationalities in the same place. Exactly as we see in the United States the foreign immigrants preferring certain states and cities, crowding together by hundreds of thousands in one place and being very scarce in other cities, so it may have been in Egypt during the time of Jeremiah. The Tyrians, numerous at Memphis, according to Herodotus, may not have had any "bazar" at Tahpanhes, etc. Thus no god is so likely to be the principal Semitic god of that frontier city as the deity worshiped by the element which must anyhow have been most numerous of all foreigners, owing to the situation and political conditions, i. e., the Jews. It is only a chance, but a very good one.

Now can our stele represent the sanctuary of Yahveh, the Lord of Hosts, the temple in which the Jews prayed for the deliverance of Jerusalem from Nebuchadnezzar, and later for her restoration? (The two ears on the stele express hope that the god will hear the prayer of his worshipers.) Of course, we have to admit that a statue of the God of Israel, worshiped there, would have been an abomination from the standpoint of Jerusalemite orthodoxy. It would, however, have been much less offensive to the latter than the "calves" of Bethel etc., which, as scholars are now agreed, attempted to represent Yahveh in the form of the heavenly bull. These "calves" were worshiped so long and so generally by Israel that a representation of God in worthy human form, as it has been attempted so often by Christian art, would appear comparatively orthodox. Furthermore, the Egyptian Jews, as we have seen, were always more or less heretical. Granting this, there is nothing which would militate against explaining our representation as an adoration of Yahveh.

The sanctuary in which he dwells must be expected to have been built in the Egyptian style (which, by the way, was that also of Solomon's temple according to the Biblical descriptions). The Egyptian symbol of the winged disk, used twice as an ornamentation at the top, would simply indicate that the temple belonged to the "Lord of Heaven," a fact which our stele expresses also by picturing sun and moon (the latter repeatedly, i. e., in various phases). The mixture of attributes, namely the tiara of Asiatic gods, the common scepter of Egyptian divinities and the "*lagobolon*" (originally the throwing stick) of Assyro-Babylonian gods, is easily understood in such a locality where East and West combined their various customs and beliefs. Instead of the lion, on which the statue stands, the



Cherubim would be more appropriate, but the variation could easily be explained by the Biblical symbolism of the lion. The forms of worship are Jewish as well as pagan—at any rate, they are not Egyptian: the little brazen altar for smaller burnt sacrifices and the high sacred pole (*masseba*) on which the priest smears sacrificial blood and oil, standing on an object which I should rather understand as a sacred chest than as an ordinary footstool. The priest's costume looks Babylonian, but the Jewish priests may well have been dressed thus in the sixth century B. C. We must expect some oddities in such a place, in general. It is not the temple at Jerusalem which we see represented here, but an imitation of it on a smaller scale, adapted to the foreign locality in a more or less bold style.

Regarded thus, the stele of Tahpanhes would gain much in interest. It would confirm Isaiah's prophecy about the five Egyptian cities speaking the language of Canaan and worshipping the Lord, as well as the claim of the Jews of Elephantine with regard to the antiquity of their temple. It would illustrate at least the great freedom of earlier Egyptian Judaism most positively, furnishing the first known attempt of Old Testament times to represent God in human form and the only attempt at such a representation available in the original.

Of course, all these conclusions rest on an assumption which can not yet be proved decisively. It must remain a matter of belief and preference whether we have here a Jewish or a pagan representation, although personally I consider the former explanation as possessing much greater probability.<sup>3</sup> It deserves, at least, full consideration by scholars.

<sup>3</sup>I made this statement for the first time, in a lecture delivered before the Soc. of Bibl. Lit., December, 1907.