

A GIANT LEAP IN MIGRATION AND DIFFUSION BY LAND AND SEA

by

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Summary

This article uses ancient sources and modern discoveries to show how enemies in pre-Roman times joined forces to escape oppression. In recent years, awareness of sea-faring by the Jews has grown, but that the Samaritans also took to the sea has not been featured. Evidence of Jewish/Samaritan cooperation, and the scope of their travel, are addressed in this article.

WE HAD ENOUGH of the endless pronouncements of diffusionists and independent-inventionists, with neither group listening to what the other has to say. On the (erroneous) total separation of the history of the Old World from the history of the New World before A.D. 1492, there is general agreement. However, a growing number of facts have been coming to light indicating that the various segments of the world were all in direct or indirect contact with each other since Neolithic times. Those facts have remained esoteric, individually known only to a specialised group of scholars.

About thirty-two miles south of Albuquerque, New Mexico, at Los Lunas, is an inscribed stone at the entrance of a ravine leading up to an area with some ancient remains (1). The local Indians say the inscribed stone was always there. My friend, the late Robert Pfeiffer of Harvard University and the Harvard Semitic Museum, was the first to recognise the script as Phoenician or Old Hebrew, and the text as essentially the Decalogue in Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21. Since he could not

explain the presence of such a text in New Mexico, he refrained from declaring whether it was ancient or just a modern forgery. I, too, did not publish any opinion on it but I did discuss the inscription with my graduate students in class.

The Smithsonian Institution of Washington, D.C., had excavated in 1889 a burial mound at Bat Creek, Tennessee, in which was found an inscription in a variety of the Old Hebrew script in which the Los Lunas Decalogue is inscribed (2). Awareness of this changed the pictures of things. Indeed, the script of the Los Lunas text is not a unique mystery in America, but a phenomenon attested to at widely separated American sites including a bona fide excavation.

IN KENTUCKY, a state adjacent to Tennessee, three coins of Bar Kokhba (who rebelled against Rome in A.D. 132-135) with the Old Hebrew script, were by chance found in Louisville (1932), Clay City (1952) and Hopkinsville (1967) (3). Clay City is a small unsophisticated town in the mountainous eastern part of Kentucky, far from the

intellectual centers of the state, and where modern collectors of Bar Kokhba coins cannot be found among its past or present residents. The coin is preserved at the town bank (4).

HERODOTUS TWICE mentions "the Syrians of Palestine". He records (in 2:104) that they practised circumcision and that (7:89) they, jointly with the Phoenicians, supplied three hundred triremes to the navy of the Achaemenian Empire. The clue to the meaning of "the Syrians of Palestine" is the Codex Theodosius 13:5:18 in which the wealthy members of the Iudaeorum corpus ac Samaritanum (= the combined Jewish and Samaritan community) had to supply ships for the conveyance of men and materiel for the Roman navy. Both peoples had (at different times) rebelled against Rome and were dealt with, administratively, jointly as the Judeo-Samaritan community. In their diaspora the two peoples felt their kinship as Israelites, while they retained their denominational differences. Their main difference was that the capital and cultic center was Mt. Gerizim for the Samaritans, but Jerusalem for the Jews (5).

Herodotus (7:89) shows that the both parts of the Israelites were already in the fifth century B.C. rendering naval service for the empire that engulfed them.

The JUDEO-SAMARITAN community naturally wanted to get as far away as possible from the long and oppressive arm of the Old World empires. While obliged to supply ships and personnel for the empires, there was nothing to stop them from escaping to the Atlantic through the Straits of Gibraltar and using their knowledge of the seas to reach America. It was possibly during the Byzantine Empire that they crossed the Atlantic, accounting for the Los Lunas and other Judeo-Samaritan inscriptions in America. Paleography (especially the letter-forms) should eventually provide more

precise (though nonetheless approximate) dates.

When Columbus first crossed the Atlantic to reach the New World in 1492, he sailed south to the Canary Islands, then proceeded westward toward the Caribbean; but he returned to Europe via the Azores. He knew in advance that the prevailing current in the Atlantic flows clockwise. There was an accumulated knowledge of the seas among the old sea-faring nations. They wanted to keep such knowledge secret and away from competitors. Columbus, unlike his predecessors, insisted on official and publicised credit for his achievements, which ended the age of such secrecy.

IN 1994, my wife Constance and I were visiting the Israeli Archaeological Museum in Jerusalem. Remembering my description of the Los Lunas inscription, she called me over to where she had come across two stone slabs with parts of the Decalogue. The museum labels stated that the Samaritans placed such stone Decalogue inscriptions at the entrance to special areas such as synagogue grounds. The Bible commands Israelites thus: "Thou shalt write them upon the doorposts of thy house and upon thy gates" (Deuteronomy 6:9; 11:20). Jews place the mezuzot on the doorposts of their houses, while the Samaritans set up their Decalogue stones at their gates (= entrances to special areas).

IN ANCIENT AMERICA, as far as we now know, the Jews and Samaritans did not operate separately, but only as the combined Judeo-Samaritan community.

Near Newark, Ohio, an honest man named David Wyrick found (in 1860) a small Decalogue stone, in a strange but unmistakable form of the Jewish script (6). On it is a depiction of Moses with the name "Moses" written over it in the three-letter name of Moses in Hebrew (spelled, as regularly in Hebrew, M-S-H (pronounced

Mosheh)). This is quite un-Jewish but understandable from a Samaritan point of view. Unlike the Jews, who have a tri-partite Bible (Pentateuch — Prophets — Hagiographa), the Samaritans have only the Pentateuch, which is often called "the five books of Moses". For the Jews, there are many biblical prophets in addition to Moses. For the Samaritans, Moses is the only prophet. In some ways, the Samaritan Moses resembles the Christian Jesus. For example, Jesus has a birthday (Christmas). The Samaritans (but not the Jews) celebrate the Molad Mosheh "the birthday of Moses" (7). The Newark (Ohio) Decalogue stone thus has Samaritan as well as Jewish elements. Nothing, so far, from ancient America should be called "purely Jewish" or "purely Samaritan" (8). They are all, as far as we now know, products of the combined Judeo-Samaritan community. We cannot accurately predict future discoveries, but this is the way things look as of now.

A REMARKABLE WOMAN named Gloria Farley with no formal university education, wrote an important book called "In Plain Sight: Old World Records In Ancient America" (9). The point of it is that America is full of the texts and artifacts of Old World visitors and settlers. Of course, there are some fakes; but like counterfeit money, they did not disprove the existence of legitimate currency.

Among the datable illustrations of long-range diffusion in the Old World is the spread of writing from the Near East to the Far East in the Shang Dynasty around 1200 B.C., as the Late Bronze Age was giving way to the dawn of the Iron Age. It was then that the inscribed oracle-bones suddenly appear at widely separated cultural centers all over China. Victor Mair, a Sinologist at the University of

Pennsylvania, wrote to me in 1987 inquiring whether anything was happening in the Near East around 1200 B.C. that might shed light on developments in China (10). I informed him that at that time the old Ugaritic alphabet of 29/30 letters was giving way to the shorter alphabet of 22 letters. Mair replied that the script on the oracle-bones had 22 special graphs (still used today) and that he felt that the numerical identity of the 22 special graphs in a 22-letter alphabet was not accidental. In other words, the ancient Near East has left its permanent mark on Chinese writing.

I KNEW that the Near East impact on China could not have been made in one direct leap. I was therefore prepared for a communication from a Bengali scholar (Mrs. Liny Srinivasan, Ph.D.) that a considerable number of words in Bengali have no Indo-European etymology and are known as "Desi" words, which she rightly suspected were in fact Canaanite. Because she does not know any of the Semitic languages, she made many errors that had to be eliminated. But I immediately saw that she was essentially right, so I sanitized and wrote up her material and the implications I detected, under joint authorship with her (11). (I insisted on placing her name first because the creative factor was her discovery.) It was trade that brought the Canaanites to Bengal, where they stopped, while others continued on to China. Their road was a forerunner of the silk route.

There is much more evidence (12) for the long-range diffusion of culture by land and sea. But, however interesting such details may be, they must not distract us from pointing out that we are approaching a time when a global history of the world can be written.

REFERENCES

- 1) An artist, named David Deal, in the 2nd edition of his book, "The Discovery of Ancient America", 1992, has useful material on the Los Lunas inscription including a copy of the text.
- 2) C. H. Gordon, "Before Columbus", 2nd edition, 1971, pp. 175-187.
- 3) Ibid., p. 175.
- 4) A business man who makes regular visits to Clay City gave me this information.
- 5) The Samaritans now live in two main communities, with about 320 people in each. One group is near Mt. Gerizim, in the vicinity of Nablus; the other is in Holon, near Tel Aviv. Under the editorship of Benyamin Tsedaka and Yefet B. Ratson Tsedaka, the community in Holon publishes "A.B. – The Samaritan News" a few times a year (in English, Hebrew, Arabic and Samaritan). The address is P.O.Box 1029, Holon 58110, Israel.
- 6) A booklet has been published with the details of the Newark (Ohio) finds. The author is Robert W. Alrutz of Denison University. The Booklet is entitled "The Newark Holy Stones – The History of an Archaeological Tragedy". It appeared in the "Journal of Scientific Laboratories", Denison University 1980, 57, 1-57 & 58-72. However, we must note that the authenticity of the Newark Decalogue is now vindicated by the subsequent discovery of Judeo-Samaritan decalogues in America.
- 7) See the excellent book by Selig J. Miller, "The Samaritan Molad Mosheh, Samaritan and Arabic Texts edited and translated with Introductuion and Notes", New York: Philosophical Library, 1949.
- 8) Misleading claims have been made, such as that either the "Jews" or the "Samaritans" discovered America.
- 9) ISAC Press, Columbus, GA 1994.
- 10) The authoritative and useful work on the subject is David N. Keightley, "Sources of Shang History: The Oracle-Bone Inscriptions of Bronze Age China", U. of Cal. Press; Berkeley CA, 1978.
- 11) L. Srinivasan and C.H. Gordon, "Canaanite Vocabulary in Bengali and in Some Other IE Dialects of India" in the 1995 volume of the journal "Mother Tongue", pp.202-206.
- 12) "Across Before Columbus?: Evidence for Transoceanic Contact with the Americas Prior to 1492"; The New England Antiquities Research Association NEARA Publications 1998; Edgecomb, Maine (edited by Donald Y. Gilmore and Linda S. McElroy); see pp.1-7 by George Carter.

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From his about 700 publications were selected those concerning the themes of migration and cultural diffusion

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