The Temple of  =$\text{H}$ at Elephantine and Persian Religious Policy

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With the renewed focus on the Persian period\(^1\) the papyri from the Jewish garrison of Elephantine\(^2\) merit reconsideration, specifically surrounding issues of religious practice.\(^3\) Of particular interest is the identification by the Jews of Elephantine of =$\text{H}$ as =$\text{H}$ in their letter to the Persian governor Bago (A.P. 30) requesting permission to rebuild their temple to =$\text{H}$. This identification by the Elephantine Jews of =$\text{H}$ as the god of heaven can and has been viewed as evidence of the Israelite deity absorbing elements of other gods,\(^4\) as a revival of an ancient biblical/Syro-Palestinian title,\(^5\) as

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\(^1\) See most recently T.L. Thompson (Early History of the Israelite People: From the Written and Archaeological Sources [SHANE 4; Leiden: Brill, 1992]) and P.R. Davies (In Search of 'Ancient Israel' [JSOTSup 148; Sheffield: JSOT 1992]) for the Persian period as the provenance for the biblical traditions. This is a complete reversal of earlier views, e.g. A. Vincent, (La religion des judéo-araméens d'Éléphantine (Paris: Geuthner, 1937), who sees some Persian era biblical traditions as "un souvenir des plus anciennes traditions d'Israël, mais ravivé ... à cette date ... sous l'influence des Perses" (109).


\(^3\) Indeed, if HB traditions can be placed in the Persian period, then one need not puzzle over the apparent laxity of the Elephantine Jews regarding the so-called Josianic reform, or even wonder why they apparently possessed no copies of biblical texts. See the incisive remark of A.E. Cowley: "So far as we learn from these texts Moses might have never have existed, there might have been no bondage in Egypt, no exodus, no monarchy, no prophets" (Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C. [Oxford: Clarendon, 1923] xxiii).

\(^4\) Thus E.G.H. Kraeling sees it "reflecting Yahweh's absorption of the title of the god Baalshamin" (The Brooklyn Museum of Aramaic Papyri [New Haven: Yale University, 1953] 84).
indication of a shift in Israelite theology from polytheism and/or henotheism to universalism, or as the Jewish garrison's attempt to equate their god with the Persian Ahura Mazda in an effort to have their request more favorably received. This article argues for the last option and sees the equation as necessary, since official Persian religious policy during this time was inclined towards an inclusive monotheism (belief in a single god of spirit, with regional refractions) centered on Ahura Mazda. Thus, in this text and in the Aramaic portions of Ezra and Nehemiah, the equation of ז"ע/ז"ע with the god of heaven is neither evidence of the Israelite deity absorbing elements of other gods, nor of a new Israelite worldview driven by an inclusive monotheism, but rather of the attempts by the Jews to have their regional god identified by the Persians as the one true god Ahura Mazda. The equation cannot be attributed to an insight generated by theological reflection but, like Persian religious policy itself, is to be attributed to matters of political expediency.

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1. The Jewish Request

A.P. 30 exhibits many features common to Aramaic epistolography: the use of the preposition ⬀ (line 1) that is rare in most all written Aramaic but common in formulaic addresses of official documents; the use of ⬀ as a transitional marker to pass from one subject to another (lines 4, 22); the placement of the subject of the letter at the beginning of sentences, in spite of grammatical awkwardness (lines 9–10 inter alii); and the inclusion of a date at the end (line 30), as in almost all Aramaic letters. Due to additions and erasures (lines 5, 11, 20, 24, 29, 30; A.P. 31:6) in the two surviving copies found at Elephantine, it is clear that they are drafts and that a presentable copy was sent to Bagohi, the Persian governor of Yehud, possibly by Persian imperial messenger.

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5 A. Vincent sees Genesis 24 as the most ancient usage of the epithet for Yahweh and its appearance at Elephantine represents it redivivus (Religion d'Éléphantine, 110–4). For H. Niehr, the title's origins lie in a "syrisch-kanaänäischer Provenienz," and is drawn upon by the Jews of Elephantine due to their ethnic background (Der höchste Gott: alttestamentliche JWHW-Glaube in Kontext syrisch-kanaänäischer Religion des 1. Jahrtausends v. Chr. [BZAW 190; Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996] 460; see also O. Eissfeldt, "Be'el'ashem und Yahweh," ZAW 16 (1939) 1–31.


7 So Thompson, Early History, 383–99; 415–23.
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3) Yedonia has also written about this matter to the High Priest Johanan in Jerusalem and to Ostanes the brother of Anani, one of the Jewish nobles and gotten no response.17

4) Since the destruction there has been no meal offering (הנאה) or sacrifice (לעבון) performed by the Jewish garrison.

5) Yedonia is seeking Bagohi's permission because he has been forbidden to rebuild the temple by unknown officials.18 If Bagohi complies, meal offerings, incense and sacrifices will be offered to Ḫnum on his behalf.

6) In addition to the offerings, Yedonia and his colleagues have also issued instructions about sending gold to the governor.19 Most commentators see this as a bribe.20 However, M. Vogelstein reads און דוחי as a dittographic cause by a scribe making the natural equation between און דוחי and before which occurs three words earlier on line 28. Vogelstein sees no need for a bribe to be so vague, since Yedonia and his colleagues later explicitly offer a bribe to an unknown official in connection with the rebuilding of the temple (A.P. 33:13).21 However, this evidence in A.P. 33 corroborates the position that A.P. 30 offers a bribe to the Persian governor in return for his favorable judgement. Since all known economic affairs at Elephantine involved either silver or goods, any offer of gold


16 A.P. 30:18-19; cf. Neh 12:22-23 and Josephus, (Ant 11.7) for עירית'הו as high priest. In Josephus this high priest is a contemporary of Bagohi.


19 "Bakshish for Bagohi?" JQR 33 (1942) 89-92.
would have been extravagant, and such a phrase as is found in Ye-
doniah’s letter would not be written in jest and certainly not as an
error. Vogelstein’s argument for ditto rests on the assumption
that מְזִיד and בָּנֵי naturally go together, even in a community
where gold was not a normal medium of exchange.

7) Yedoniah has also written to Delaiah and Shemaliah, the sons
of Sanballat the governor of Samaria. In addition, and indeed almost
as an afterthought, Yedoniah makes it clear to Bagohi that Arsames
knew nothing of the matter. Although it is not explicitly men-
tioned that Arsames is a subordinate of Bagohi and there is no informa-
tion regarding any hierarchy among the Persian satrapies, it can be
surmised from this letter and from A.P. 32, where Bagohi and De-
laiah direct Arsames to rebuild the temple, that the Egyptian gov-
ernor was in some way answerable to the governors of Yehud and
Samaria. Such an answerability need not have been formal, as
sources are clear that espionage among satraps vying for the king’s
favor was commonplace. Yedoniah may not so much have been
going over Arsames’ head as he was attempting to make the situa-
tion known among the governor’s potential rivals who were each
eager for the goodwill of Darius. To say that Arsames knew noth-
ing of the destruction of the temple can be an attempt either to dis-
tance him from a potentially politically harmful incident or draw
attention to his lack of knowledge and control over acts of violence
in his territory.

2. The Governor’s Response

Compared to the official correspondence sent by Yedoniah, the
directive sent from Bagohi and Delaiah to Arsames fittingly deserv-
es the name of memorandum. The copy at Elephantine is riddled with


24 A.P. 32; text, translation and comments in Cowley, Aramaic Papyri, 122–4; plates in Sachau, Aramäische Papyri, 1.4; complete bibliography in Fitzmeyer, Aramaic Bibliography, 65; translation in ANET, 492 and Thomas, Documents, 265–6.

25 The Temple of Darius at Elephantine and Persian Religious Policy sloppiness. There are erasures in lines 2 and 8, an added line be-
tween lines 1 and 2 and an added word in line 2. The document is
addressed to no one; that the instructions are to be relayed to Arsa-
mes is added. It tersely begins: “Memorandum from Bagohi and De-
laiah, they said to me ...”. There is a hole in the papyrus that was
apparently there before it was used, since the scribe has written
around it. It agrees with the details of Yedoniah’s letter on every
point but three:

1) It calls for the rebuilding of a house of offering; המצות, and not a temple;emie (cf. A.P. 30:6,7,24 and A.P. 32:3).26

2) The building is to be dedicated to the god of heaven; יהוה, and not to יי, who is not even named in the memorand-
um. K. Galling notes that this absence “ist schwerlich Zufall,”
while A. Vincent surmises, although without any supporting evi-
dence, that Bagohi was a Jew, and therefore, that Yedoniah wrote
to him using the proper name of the deity both men worshipped,
while in his response Bagohi, acting as a representative of the Per-
sian empire, employed the generic term.27 In fact, the omission of
the proper name יהוה in A.P. 32 bears significance only in light of
the equation of the name with the title המצות in A.P. 30.

3) The new building will be for meal offering and incense but
not for sacrifices. This absence is made all the more intriguing by
the fact that an erasure has occurred on line 8 precisely where the
permission for sacrifices would have occurred. Yedoniah’s letter
twice speaks of meal offerings, incense and sacrifice in the same
order (30:21,25). The memorandum speaks of meal offering and in-
cense in the same order, but omits sacrifice. B. Porten posits the
erased word to have been המצות,28 but the papyrus is too difficult
to decipher with certainty. However, apart from the erasure, it is
clear that the memorandum does not allow sacrifices. This prohi-
bition is reinforced by A.P. 33, wherein Yedoniah and his collea-
gues offer a large bribe to an unknown official for rebuilding the
temple and promise that “sheep, oxen and goats are not offered as burnt


27 Epstein, “Glossen,” 103 and Galling, Studien, 70.

28 “Aramaic Papyri and Parchments,” 98.
sacrifice there, but incense, meal offering and drink offering only.\textsuperscript{29}

It is unclear why Bagohi would have forbidden burnt offering (cf. Ezra 7:17 where the Persians appear to allow animal sacrifice at the Jerusalem temple). Some have posited that the Egyptian priests of Khnum, who is represented as a ram, were scandalized and that this was the cause of the temple’s destruction. Indeed, K. Galling traces the destruction to the so-called “Passover Papyrus,” (A.P. 21), dated 419, which directs the Jews of Elephantine to observe the feast. For Galling, the Jewish garrison’s obedience to the Passover Papyrus is the origin of ram sacrifice there.\textsuperscript{30} Others feel that Bagohi, by virtue of being Persian, was a Zoroastrian and thus, would not want fire defiled by animal remains. However, M. Boyce sees Bagohi’s assumed “Zoroastrian observance of animal sacrifice” as signifying that he “had no religious scruples about aiding those of other faiths to make similar offerings.”\textsuperscript{31} It should be remembered that, according to Josephus, Bagohi continued to allow animal sacrifice in the Jerusalem temple after the murder of his candidate for high priest but that he imposed a tribute for every lamb offered.\textsuperscript{32} Since Yedoniah’s request, tendered with a bribe, is granted, the possibility that Bagohi had no religious scruples whatsoever should not be ruled out. Others see the destruction of the temple as entirely political and tied to the continued loyalty of the Jews to Persia in the face of the Egyptian unrest that led to the revolt of 404. The Jews suffer because they are soldiers in the service of Persia, not because they are Jews.\textsuperscript{33} There are a myriad of reasons, both political and religious, for Widranag and the Egyptian priests to have destroyed the temple: they may have been outraged by the sacrifice of rams, they may have been part of the Egyptian unrest with Persian rule that was to lead to full-scale rebellion, or they may have been envious of the temple’s economic influence.\textsuperscript{34} That it was rebuilt is made clear by Brooklyn papyrus 12, dated 402, which makes reference to the temple.\textsuperscript{35}

3. אַלְּאָה נְשָׁמָה שַׁמֶּשׁ

In A.P. 30 there is a curious progression of nomina divina demonstrating Yedoniah’s attempt to have Bagohi equate עם with the god of heaven.

1) Bagohi’s health is commended to אלהים שמש (line 1)\textsuperscript{36}
2) עם is the god who is in Yeb (line 4)
3) The Jews pray to אלהים עם for revenge upon Widranag (line 15)
4) עם is a god worshipped in Yeb (lines 24–25)
5) If Bagohi complies he will merit much before אלהים עם (lines 27–28)

A subtle shift is apparent. After commending Bagohi to the generic god of heaven (i.e. Ahura Mazda), Yedoniah next treats circumstances surrounding the temple of the local deity עם. The letter ends with a promise of Bagohi’s being blessed by the same god of heaven to whom he was commended at the beginning of the letter, except this time the god is equated with the local god of the Jews, עם.\textsuperscript{37} Although the role of the offered gold (see above) cannot be

\textsuperscript{29} See Studien, 152-4.

\textsuperscript{30} "Persian Religion," 1.292.

\textsuperscript{31} See note 12 above.

\textsuperscript{32} Contra Vincent (Religion d'Éléphantine, 96) and Niehr (Hochstef Gott, 48), who see salutations as useless for making conclusions regarding nomina divina. Niehr’s conclusion can be valid regarding the religious practices of the Elephantine Jews, but nomina divina in salutations are terribly important in determining how the sender wished the message to be perceived by the recipient. This is all the more important when the sender is an inferior writing to a superior in search of a favor, as is A.P. 30. Yedoniah could have commended Bagohi to "all the gods" as is done in other Elephantine documents such as A.P. 17:12, which possibly is addressed to Arsames (so Porten, "Aramaic Letters," 46), A.P. 21:2, which is from Yedoniah to עם, and A.P. 37:1.

\textsuperscript{33} In addition to the citations in notes 4–7 above, see also M. Smith, "Jewish Religious Life in the Persian Period," in The Cambridge History of Judaism (2 vols.; ed. W.D. Davies and L. Finkelstein; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1984) 1.219–78, esp. 228, and Cook ("Significance of Elephantine Papyrus," 374), who sees the title as merely "suggestive of Persian use." Andrews ("God of the Heavens,"
underestimated, Yedoniah’s success in convincing Bagohi is evidenced by the fact that Bagohi grants permission for an offering house to be built to the god of heaven. This equation makes the granting of permission easier by the Persian administrative official as it then is consonant with imperial policy at that time.\(^{38}\) This explanation makes better sense than others heretofore offered, since it does not require the traversing of many miles and centuries to the origin of the term “god of heaven” (so Niehr, Vincent, \textit{inter alios}).\(^{39}\) Nor does it require one to posit a new level of theological speculation on the part of the Elephantine Jews (so Porten, Thompson, \textit{inter alios}).\(^{40}\) There is confusion among the authors cited above regarding the origins of the term “god of heaven,” its \textit{signification} to the Elephantine Jews and the Persians (for these are two different things) and its \textit{specific meaning} in A.P. 30. While the term’s origins may lie in Bronze Age Syria-Palestine, its meaning for a Jewish community in their correspondence with the Persian administration a millennium later is another issue.

4. Persian Religious Policy: Cyrus to Artaxerxes II

In the Cyrus cylinder and the two texts of the Cyrus decree in Ezra 1 and 2 Chronicles 36 we see a policy wherein the emperor is portrayed as the chosen agent of the high god from the particular conquered region. Consequent to this is the implicit identification of the high god with the Persian \textit{Ahura Mazda}. Thus, Cyrus “publicly appears as the devotee and servant of the religion of the (newly-

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\(^{38}\) This is borne out as well by the occurrences of the term. Of the ten occurrences of \textit{אֱלֹהִי}, \textit{אֱלֹהִים}, \textit{אֱלֹהִים} and \textit{אֱלֹהִים} in the Elephantine corpus, six are in A.P. 30 and 32. Similarly, \textit{אֱלֹהִי} occurs in the HB only in the Cyrus decree and when Jews are speaking to foreigners, except for the intriguing \textit{אֱלֹהִי} in Jer 10:11. The only possible exception to this could be Gen 24:3,7; however, here \textit{אֱלֹהִי} is not the actual title but is only part of a larger title \textit{אֱלֹהִיים אֱלֹהִים נוֹרַחַי} which is seen by Vincent as the ancient source of the term (see note 5). See Andrews, “God of the Heavens,” 45,48.

\(^{39}\) See note 5 above.

\(^{40}\) See notes 4, 6-7, 33 above.


\(^{42}\) “God of the Heavens,” 57.

\(^{43}\) See Cook’s discussion of Persian religious policies (\textit{Persian Empire}, 147-57, esp. 148-9) as well as his observation that the Persians were reluctant to involve themselves in the religious matters of their subject peoples. Evidence does not bear out this second assertion; see below. Inclusive monotheism is a more appropriate term than Cook’s (and others’) use of syncretism.

\(^{44}\) Herodotus 3.27-30; Καμβόγκης δὲ ἡ λέγεται Αἴγυπτος αὐτίκα διὰ τοῦτο τὸ ἄδικημα ἐμένη ἐνός ὑπὲρ πρὸς ἐνεργός (3.30). See note 15.

\(^{45}\) See Boyce, “Persian Religion,” 1.288.

\(^{46}\) Gray, “Foundation of Persian Empire,” 4.24-5.
all choices of temple administrators. This privilege was key to Darius’ control of the power of the Egyptian priests, whose power was explicitly tied to the large amount of revenue they generated.  

With Xerxes I we are fortunate to possess an inscription regarding his destruction of temples in conquered countries, wherein the king destroys the temples because “they performed festivals to the evil gods.” Xerxes destroys these temples, forbids the performance of the rites, and performs a proper sacrifice to Ahura Mazda. The inscription ends with a word to the wise: “Whosoever you are in future days who thinks as follows: ‘May I be prosperous in this life and blessed after my death’ do live according to this law which Ahura Mazda has promulgated: ‘Perform religious rites only for Ahura Mazda and for the cosmic order reverently’” (emphasis mine). At first blush this text paints Xerxes as motivated purely by piety. However, it is clear that his destruction of temples was due to concerns other than piety. The inscription speaks of Xerxes’ purification of temples in the same group of countries wherein he puts down rebellion. Indicative of Xerxes’ priorities, the inscription treats the rebellion in these countries before turning to their impetecy. After his destruction of the Esagila in Babylon, Xerxes allowed the priests there to continue to worship on the ruins without hindrance, and after he destroyed the Acropolis he ordered the Greeks to sacrifice on the ruins. Herodotus makes the curious observation that Xerxes may have felt guilt or may have been given a vision regarding the destroyed temple on the Acropolis that led him to order worship on its ruins. M. Boyce sees the acts at the Esagila and Acropolis as political, while the inscription is motivated by piety. These two motivations cannot be so easily separated and applied from one case to another. Rather, they must be seen as a continual interplay between political motives couched in religious terms and religion used for political ends.

The actions of Xerxes I mark a shift in Persian religious policy from the more conciliatory approaches of Cyrus and his immediate successors. Where formerly, the policy was to equate the regional god with the Persian high god Ahura Mazda, and for rulers such as Cyrus and Darius to style themselves as restoring proper worship of the regional deities, Xerxes appears to view worship of local gods as false worship and restores the true, exclusive worship of Ahura Mazda. It is no longer a case of the Persian administration making the equation of the local god with the high god; rather, in the face of a Persian policy focused exclusively on the high god, it is the task of the worshippers of the local/regional god to make the equation and then to convince the Persians as well. Xerxes’ exclusive focus on the Persian high god is further evidenced by the fact that all extant inscriptions dating from Xerxes I to Artaxerxes II mention no other gods but Ahura Mazda. It is towards the end of this 80 year period (ca. 486-405) that the destruction of the Elephantine temple, Yedoniah’s request and Bagohi’s response fall. Yedoniah is making an equation in order to appear to be within the bounds of a policy already at least three quarters of a century old.

5. A.P. 30 in the Context of Persian Religious Policy

Seen in the larger context of an imperial policy driven by an inclusive monotheism, the wording of Yedoniah’s request stands as a brilliant use of the policy to advance the cause of the Jewish garrison at Elephantine. As leader of a community his concern is to reestablish their cult place. In an effort to have a sympathetic ear for his appeal, Yedoniah, in addition to an offered bribe, equates

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48 Such an imperial attempt to control the economic power of the Egyptian cult was no new thing in the Persian period. It can be seen as one of the main factors surrounding Akhenaton’s so-called monotheistic reform and his establishment of a new capital and cult center at Amarna in the 14th century.
49 ANET, 316-7.
50 So Herodotus 8.52-55; εἰτε δή δὲν δὴν τίνα ἱδὸν ἐνυπίου ἐνετέλλετο ταῦτα, εἰτε καὶ ἐνθάμιον οἱ ἑγένετο ὑπηρέται τὸ ἱερόν (8.54).
52 See Cook, Persian Empire, 147.
53 For both religious and economic reasons. See the collection list of A.P. 22 in which Yedoniah collects the large sum of 318 silver shekels for the temple of ιν”. This is five times more than the largest dowry paid at Elephantine and roughly twice the size of any known legal fines; see Porten, Archives from Elephantine, 73-5.
the local god ז' with Ahura Mazda through use of the appellative איש מזר. This would have been necessary since Persian imperial policy at the time named no other gods but Ahura Mazda in official texts and had ceased making such equations between regional deities and the high god. In earlier times, the imperial administration already might have equated the local Jewish god with the god of heaven, but by the time of Yedoniah’s letter it is his responsibility to make this equation for the Persians. The imperial policy is also evident in Bagohi’s directive to rebuild the temple to the god of heaven without mentioning ז’ by name.55 Yedoniah’s political savvy is matched by Bagohi’s who, recognizing the need to maintain the goodwill of the Jewish garrison who are servants of the empire, orders the temple to be rebuilt, but forbids the animal sacrifice that perhaps caused Widranag and the priests of Khnum to destroy it in the first place. Their motivation must remain speculative, however, since Widranag and the priests apparently had caused a non-religious disturbance at Elephantine by destroying royal storehouses (cf. A.P. 27).56 Bagohi’s actions are in concert with the precedent of the religious policy of Xerxes I, dominated by political expediency couched in the language of monotheism. As such, one need not delve into issues of theological reflection regarding the

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application of the appellative “god of the heavens” by Jews to their god. This usage is rather to be traced to the more pragmatic, secular and observable context of the early Persian empire.

The equation of ז’ with אליהו שמש in this particular instance is not generated by theological reflection and cannot function in this period as evidence of Jewish worship of a universal high god with regional refractions, although it testifies to the already clearly observable Persian policy of inclusive monotheism begun by Cyrus and modified by Xerxes I.57 The Jews of Elephantine commended themselves to and swore oaths by ז’, אבר, גמל, חנית, חנק, וチャ, קלח, צמח, אליאב שמש among others, with a particular deity being chosen as the context demanded.58 That ז’ was the premiere deity of their pantheon is indisputable; the temple is dedicated to him. However, offerings were collected for other deities as well (cf. A.P. 22). What we see in A.P. 30 is a usage dictated by a pragmatism that seeks the appearance of adherence to an imperial religious policy that itself is

54 That ז’ is a local god is clear by the frequent appellative איש מזר found in the Elephantine documents.

55 Cf. also the Aramaic copy of the Behistun inscription of Darius I found at Elephantine (Cowley, Aramaic Papyri, 248–71) that contains numerous occurrences of the phrase איש מזר with various personal names in A.P. 38.5 as well as the frequent use of “under the shadow of Ahura Mazda” in the Xerxes inscription. See Cook (Persian Religion, 374) for evidence regarding Elephantine’s place in the larger life of the empire, despite its remote location. Cook notes that presence of the Behistun text, Phoenician winejar handles and Elephantine’s important location on the second cataract mean that “we are not entitled to regard the Jewish colony as some secluded, parochial community, living a sequestered life, maintaining such religious conceptions as the early founders had brought with them, and untouched by, if not ignorant of, events in the world outside” (366–7). Contra Vincent (Religion d’Éléphantine, 99) for whom “La petite colonie juive n’a rien d’une académie de sages orientaux, ce sont de pauvres gens, attachés à la foi de leurs ancêtres et ils en gardent précieusement le trésor mélangé malheureusement de beaucoup de scories ... Ils n’ont ni les loisirs, ni la culture intellectuelle, ni la fréquentation des cercles mosaïques qui leur permettraient d’élaborer un semblant de théologie.”

56 See the discussion above.

57 See Galling (Studien, 149): “Diese Motive werden nicht selten von der ‘Weltanschauung’ der Achämeniden abgeleitet, die u.E. jedoch nur eine sekundäre Rolle spielt ... die Aktionen und Reaktionen des persischen Hoves ganz konkrete gesamtpolitische Erwägungen ausgelöst worden sein;” Vincent (Religion d’Éléphantine, 142–3): “Il y avait surtout trop d’intérêts pratiques et matériels en jeu pour que les scribes qui réignaient dans les bureaux et rédigeaient les protocoles, ne dissument pas les divergences culturelles pour ne mettre en lumière que les ressemblances et à la faveur de cette unification, non seulement défendre et protéger, mais encore favoriser certains intérêts religieux, ethniques ou nationaux qui pouvaient leur être chers. Il n’est pas douteux que les Juifs aient profité de ces bonnes dispositions ... on comprend que les colons juifs de Ieb aient essayé de profiter de ces bonnes dispositions des autorités perses à l’égard des dieux célestes. Ils ont accentué la confusion, en affectant de se servir dans leur correspondance officielle d’une expression à double sens. Ils ont tenté ainsi contre des papiers attardés dans l’adoration d’un dieu bélier d’obtenir des maîtres de l’heure l’autorisation de reconstruire leur temple;” and Thompson (“Intellectual Matrix”) in this volume.

58 See Porten (Archives from Elephantine, 150–8) regarding Jews taking oaths by a plethora of deities according to context. Thus, the Jewish woman Mbitaiyah swears by Sati in the divorce from her Egyptian husband (A.P. 14–4). By way of analogy, Smith’s observation on the data theophoric elements in names may yield regarding religious practices is valid here: “to name a child for a god gave no assurance that when the child grew up it would worship its namesake” (“Jewish Religious Life,” 222). That is to say, the child is named for a particular god based on the situation of its parents, whose motivations may or may not have been religious.
dictated by pragmatism. Gods referred to in salutations can furnish information regarding deities worshipped by the sender, the recipient or both. Apart from this, these nomina divina may also be an indication of the type of relationship that existed between the two parties, or they may be meaningless protocol that is, nonetheless, a necessary part of the letter (e.g. the use of "sincerely," or "yours truly" in modern letters).\textsuperscript{59} To ask questions of theological signification of texts that are clearly not dealing with issues of theological speculation disregards the genre of the texts under study and the limits that genre sets on the type of data a text can and cannot yield.

\textsuperscript{59} See opera citata above in notes 9 and 36.