

**PAPERS READ BEFORE THE
JEWS COLLEGE LITERARY
SOCIETY DURING THE
SESSION 1886-7**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649111763

Papers read before the Jews College Literary Society during the session 1886-7 by Various

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P A P E R S

READ BEFORE THE

Jews' College Literary Society

DURING THE SESSION

1886-7.

REPRINTED FROM THE "JEWISH CHRONICLE."

LONDON :
OFFICE OF THE "JEWISH CHRONICLE,"
2, FINSBURY SQUARE.

1887.

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P197

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SECTS AMONG THE JEWS.

BY A. NEUBAUER, M.A., OXFORD.

Ladies and gentlemen : The paper I am going to read to you on the Sects of the Jews will not contain any great novelty. For, good accounts of them can be found in the historical works of our celebrated Dr. Graetz, and also in Jost's History of Judaism, not to speak of many minor historical compilations made on the basis of these standard books. Still I have tried to collect information from the most recent documents, more especially as regards the modern Samaritans and the Karaites ; the literature of the latter has become known to us only since the publication of extracts from the great collection of the St. Petersburg Library, chiefly by the late Pinsker. Much more is to be expected on this subject when Dr. Harkavy publishes the catalogue of the most recent acquisitions of this library. We have been made acquainted with the Falashas by the accounts given by the well known Joseph Halévy and some missionaries.

The Jews are at present divided into two principal sects, 1st, those who recognise the authority of an oral tradition, which is embodied in the Talmudic books and who are called the men of the Talmud or Rabbinites ; 2nd, those who reject the Talmud, relying solely on Scripture, who style themselves Karaites, which means readers of Scripture. We shall find in each of these two sects some subdivisions. But before giving the history and development of the Karaites, for I shall not say much of the Rabbinites to whom we all belong and whose history is known to all present, you will allow me to say a word about the once important Samaritans and about sects that existed during the epoch of the Second Temple.

The division between Israel and Judah appeared under a new form after the return of the exiles to Jerusalem. It was no more the worship of Jehovah as the Invisible and Almighty God as opposed to the calf and other idols that was in question, but the dispute was between Jerusalem as the centre of worship and Mount Garizim. The relics of the old Israel, now represented by the inhabitants of Samaria, accepted the authority of the Pentateuch, which they still possess in their old Ibric or Samaritan writing. Only they introduced some alterations in the text in favour of Mount Garizim and Sichem. Of course the Samaritans pretended that the Jews had altered the text in favour of Jerusalem. The Samaritans still have their great assemblies on certain feast days on Mount Garizim, they pronounce the blessings on it in their prayers, and they sacrifice the Paschal lamb there, the only sacrifice they have retained ; for they substituted, like the other Jews, prayers in place of the sacrifices. The Samaritans know nothing of any other biblical writings besides the Pentateuch. Some critics think that they rejected the prophetic and other books of the Old Testament because Jerusalem is mentioned in them as the place of worship. But why should they not have altered Jerusalem to Garizim while accepting them, as they did in the case of the Pentateuch ? It is more likely either that the Prophets and the Hagiographa were not yet written down when the Samaritans separated from the Jews, or that these books were written solely in the

Aramaic characters which could not be read and which were considered as profane by them. The Book of Joshua which the Samaritans possess in Arabic, is wholly different from the biblical book, and was composed not earlier than the eighth century, A.D., and both the Chronicles they still have, one in Samaritan and the other in Arabic, are alike of a still later date.

Mount Garizim is the centre of the Samaritan just as Jerusalem is of the Jewish religion. Upon it, or at least above it, they say that Paradise is situated, and that the rain comes from it. The first man was formed from the earth of Garizim and dwelt there. The Samaritans still show the place where Adam and Seth built their altars. Garizim is identified by them with Mount Ararat, and here they say the Ark rested. Noah also made his sacrifices here. The altar whereon Abraham intended to sacrifice Isaac, is also shown here, and even the place where the ram stood. Bethel, according to them, is to be found on the top of Garizim, and there stood the ladder which Jacob saw in his dream. Somewhat below they show the place where the house of the High Priest stood, and further on is the place where they sacrifice now. To the West of it they believe is the site of the village Makedah, where they show the cave to which the five Canaanitish kings fled. To all these places the Samaritans make pilgrimages in procession three times every year, viz., on the Passover Feast, the Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles. They recite special hymns on that occasion whilst walking in procession. The Samaritans observe seven feasts, according to Leviticus xxiii. The chief feast is the Passover, when they offer the sacrifices of the lambs, at sunset on the 15th of Nisan, accompanied by prayers which end with the High Priest's blessing addressed to 12 persons representing the congregation, most probably a reminiscence of the twelve tribes. Chapters of the Pentateuch are then read and hymns recited. When the sacrifices are roasted, they begin the evening meal which they eat in haste with sticks in their hands, as literally prescribed in the Pentateuch. They also eat unleavened bread with bitter herbs and pronounce the blessing over a kind of wine which they take before and after the hasty meal. The second feast they call the Feast of Unleavened Bread, פֶּסַח, which lasts seven days, of which the first and last days are complete feast days, as well as the intervening Sabbath, called the Sabbath of the Sea, because they read on that day the song of Miriam, and from this Sabbath they begin to count the 50 days up to the Pentecost. Sometimes the Festival of Unleavened Bread falls on a Sabbath Day and in that case the two feasts are kept on the same day. This Sabbath is also called the Great Sabbath. On this day as well as on seven others, the most ancient Pentateuch Scroll of the five kept at Nablûs is shown and everybody kisses it. They pretend that this copy was written by Abisha son of Phineas, thirteen years previous to the entry of the Israelites into the land of Chanaan. Between the sixth and seventh Sabbaths, three days before Pentecost, they have the third feast called the Day of Sinai or the day of the dwelling on Sinai or the day of Scripture, for on this day the whole Pentateuch is recited. This festival falls on a Wednesday. The following Sabbath is also called the Great Sabbath or the Sabbath of the Word, viz. the Ten Commandments. Then comes the Pentecost which is called the Feast of the First Fruit; it is celebrated by a procession to Mount Garizim, when prayers and hymns are recited, and the whole Pentateuch read out.

On the Feast of the Trumpets they read the Ten Commandments and the old Scroll is shown. This day does not begin the new year with them as it does with the other Jews. They begin with the 1st of Nisan which is the first month according to the Pentateuch. On the Day of Atonement they abstain for 24 hours from eating, drinking, sleeping, and even talking, and they remain all the time in the synagogue. At the evening service the ancient Scroll is shown and the first two books of the Pentateuch are read; the three others are read during the day's ser-

vice with many of their best hymns. The Feast of Tabernacles lasts eight days, the first and the last as well as the intervening Sabbath are complete feast days. They construct huts of laurel branches intermixed with other aromatic leaves and begin the feast at sunset after having recited some Pentateuch verses and some prayers. They then assemble for the general prayers, and after having read the Pentateuch proceed in procession to Mount Garizim. As far as it is known, they do not use the *Lulab*, the *Ethroy*, and the willows of the brook. Neither are they acquainted with the *Teflin* or the *Zizit*. However, when they take out the Scroll from the Ark, they put a dress over their heads which they call *Talith*. On the ordinary Sabbath they have special prayers and read the Pentateuch in sections, which are differently divided from the Rabbinical sections. Besides these seven feasts, they have two days of Assembly in the year called פסח , on which the high priest collects the offerings, called פסחית .

The Samaritans in some respects observe the Law more strictly than the Rabbinites and the Karaites. They, for instance, wear in the synagogues shoes prepared from skins of sheep killed in their houses. The women wear no earrings, because the golden calf was made of them. Circumcision is strictly observed, even when the eighth day falls on a Sabbath. Thanksgivings are pronounced on the Sabbath following the birth of a boy, but not of a girl. To take any notice of birthdays is strictly prohibited as a pagan custom, because Pharaoh was feasted on his birthday. I think that many amongst us would be glad to observe in this respect the Samaritan severity of custom. The wedding ceremonies are very simple. A grown-up lady can only be obtained by her consent, whilst the younger ones are given away by the father. The dowry is given to the bride and not to the father. When the consent of the father is obtained, the priest pronounces the following sentence in the Samaritan dialect: "The covenant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is true, a firm covenant according to the law of God and his messenger Moses, son of Amram, the peace of the Lord be with him." Then the marriage contract is read. The wedding ceremony usually takes place on Fridays, and on the following Sabbath chapters of the Pentateuch are read out, more especially Genesis chapter xxiv., which contains the history of Eliezer and Rebecca. Bigamy is allowed in case there are no children from the first wife, but in no case is polygamy tolerated. The obligation of the Levirate does not fall upon the brother of the deceased, but on his nearest friend, for the Samaritans translate דברים "friends" and not "brothers." Divorce is performed by means of a written document, which the priest reads. It is signed by two witnesses, and is given to the woman with half of her dowry. The ceremonies of burial are that after the corpse has been washed, passages of the Pentateuch are read and some hymns, called the Hymns of the Angels, are sung. The Sabbath after the funeral, the whole congregation goes, after the morning prayers, to the grave, where a common meal is eaten, and passages of the Pentateuch read and the Angel Hymn sung. As to their creed, they have been as far as their documents go back, pure monotheists; they believe thoroughly in the Unity of God and reject all use of images. The late Dr. Petermann related the following curious fact, that when the High Priest paid him a visit at Nablûs, he saw on the wall a portrait, from which he at once averted his face, asking Dr. Petermann's pardon. The story reported in the Talmud that the Samaritans have the image of a dove on Garizim cannot be relied upon, and the same is the case with the passage in which it is stated that they adore an idol called *Ashima*. The dove might have been mistaken for an eagle which the Romans put there after they had destroyed the Temple on the Mount, and *Ashima* is probably a mistake for the word *Sh'mo*, which the Samaritans employ for the tetragrammaton, just as the Jews employ the word שם or שמים . It has been suspected by some travellers that the Samaritans perhaps hide their idol in a partition of a wall which they never open to any visitor. Dr. Petermann, however, has succeeded in examining this famous hiding place and has found noth-

ing else but a half rotten leaf of vellum, on which the priestly blessing, beginning בְּרִיכָךְ is written, according to the Samaritan tradition, by the hand of the High Priest Eleazer, son of Phineas. As to their belief in angels and demons, Paradise and Gehenna, the resurrection and the advent of the Messiah, we can only speak on the authority of relatively late documents. From these we learn that they do not deny the existence of angels and demons, which they find even in the words, "the spirit of God," and the darkness at the beginning of Genesis. They believe in Paradise, Gehenna and future life, but have no traditional ideas in regard to them; indeed, the same is the case with the Talmud, where only individual reports are given as to the character of Paradise, Gehenna and the future life. The last judgment, they say, will come after the advent of the Messiah, whom they call *Tabeh*, that is he who will bring men to God or to repentance, and who will not be greater than Moses. They in fact read at the end of Deuteronomy, "And there will not arise a prophet in Israel like unto Moses," instead of "and there arose not." This is their only Messianic passage, for Shilo (Gen. xlix. 10) is interpreted by them to mean Solomon.

The study of Samaritan has been advanced during the last thirty years by the late Dr. Petermann, Dr. Kohn of Buda Peth, Dr. Heidenheim of Zurich, and by the Rev. J. W. Natt, formerly sub-Librarian of the Bodleian Library. But we are still awaiting an edition of the prayer books of the Samaritans of which there exist MSS. in the British Museum and in the Bodleian Library, an edition which would not only be of importance for liturgical history, but also for Semitic philology. The Samaritans possess no great amount of literature. Besides the Samaritan Targum, the liturgies, hymns, and the Chronicles, they have some Arabic commentaries on the Pentateuch. Formerly, even during the Middle Ages, there were Samaritan congregations in many localities in Palestine and in Syria. At present they are to be found only in Sichem and the neighbouring villages, and number not more than 165 souls. Not intermarrying with other nationalities, they are likely to disappear soon. They speak only Arabic and the Samaritan language is not familiar even to the High Priest.

There are no sects amongst the living Samaritans, they are not numerous enough for allowing themselves such a luxury. Epiphanius, however, reports that one of the sects amongst them was called *Sebuaioi*. These Sectarrians began the year in the autumn, which was soon followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread, whilst the Feast of the Tabernacle was kept in the spring. He names also a kind of Essenian sect called *Gordenoi*. Abu-l-Fath in his Arabic chronicle speaks of a certain Dostân, who formed a sect, of which there are some contradictory reports.

Amongst the Jews during the epoch of the 2nd Temple the two principal sects were the Pharisees and the Sadducees who are well known to you from Josephus, the New Testament and books written on the state of the Jews in the time of Jesus. The Essenes, who are mentioned in neither the New Testament nor in the Talmud, at least under that name, seem to have formed a branch of the Pharisees, observing special ceremonies, such as bathing early in the morning ἤμω βαπτύσασθαι ; טוֹבֵלֵי עֶזְרַיִת and others observed with the utmost rigor the Sabbath Μαγίστραται ἡ ἡμέρη τῆς ἑβδομάδος. Other smaller sects mentioned in the New Testament, by Hegesippus and Eusebius formed also fractions of the two principal sects. Thus the Herodians were a section of the Sadducees and were partisans of the Herodian dynasty. The Galileans are probably the first adherents of Jesus. The Gaulanites are the Zealots or the adherents of Judah of Gaulanitis, the founder of the party of zealots. With the destruction of the second Temple all parties disappeared among the Jews who were allowed to settle at Jabneh and the neighbouring district. There was no longer any reason for the existence of the Sadducees whose chief points of difference from the Pharisees bore upon political matters and on ceremonies performed in the Temple. The Pharisees who for a long time

were the favorites of the people took the religious direction of the nation entirely in their hands under the name of Rabbanim or Rabbis, a denomination used already in the New Testament. The two schools of Palestine and Babylon gradually settled the ritual law, the discussions in which are contained in the two Talmuds and epitomised for more general use in books of precepts and treatises of the Halachah by the successors of the Talmudic doctors, about 700 A.D. They were known under the name of Gaonim, the proud or the honoured Rabbis. The law consists according to the Talmudic school of 613 precepts of which 248 are affirmative and 365 prohibitive; these numbers correspond with the members of the human body which according to the physiology of the time were counted 248 and the number of the 365 veins, or according to others the 365 days of the solar year. To observe 613 precepts is rather a heavy obligation; fortunately many of them are only theoretical, applying to ceremonies to be observed in the Temple; others apply only to Palestine, such as tithes, first fruits and others. I shall pass over the enumeration of the rabbinical precepts, which are all well known to you. Let me only say that a good number of the 613 precepts are of a purely ethical character, and state which are considered the most important ones. Such is love of one's neighbour, almsgiving, the study of the law, and prayer.

The various branches of the *Perushim* and the *Chasidim*, which still exist in Poland and Russia, in Hungary and the East, more especially in Jerusalem, are an outgrowth of Rabbinism, mixed with mystical or Kabbalistic ideas. Such was the sect of Shabbathai Zebi (usually known as the *Sheps*, a corruption from Shabbethai), which was a still more fanatical outgrowth and has now died out. All the Jews are now Rabbinites, more or less reformed. They amount to 6,392,000 souls, according to M. Loeb in his monograph on the Jews, 1884. Although omitting to give a description of the Rabbinical interpretation of the ceremonies, I must ask leave to say a word or two on the manner of fixing the Jewish calendar amongst the Rabbinites in opposition to the other sects. All the Jews have lunar months, which, as you know, is also the case with the Mohametans. In order to observe the Passover in Spring and the Feast of Tabernacles in the Autumn, as prescribed in the Pentateuch, the Jews have every three or four years an intercalated month before the spring month, which is called *ve-Adar*, the additional *Adar*. The Mohametans have no intercalation, their feasts fall consequently in various years, in various months. Thus their great feast, the *Ramadan*, may fall in December as well as in July or August. Up to the third century the New Moon Days were fixed from observations made by a special body of the Sanhedrin and were proclaimed by fire-signals on certain mountains to the Jews in exile or Babylonia. The Samaritans out of opposition having sometimes lighted fires in order to mislead the Jews outside Palestine, the Sanhedrin gave up using signals and instituted messengers who were sent to the Diaspora. As it happened sometimes that the observation of the New Moon was wrongly made, especially on cloudy days, and that therefore the festivals had to be a day later, and it was too late to stop the messengers who had already gone to the various parts of Asia, it was settled that outside Palestine two days should be observed instead of one day prescribed in the Pentateuch, with the exception of the Day of Atonement. It would have indeed been hard to fast for 50 hours instead of 25. When the calendar was fixed in the 3rd century, the Jews in the Diaspora clung out of conservatism to the old usage and always kept a two days' feast instead of one. This tradition is still continued by the bulk of the synagogues. I must also mention the thirteen Articles of Faith, *Thirteen Principles*, the Jewish Creeds, put into shape by the great Maimonides, which we shall find later on among the Karaites. The last three are, as you know, given in English: "I believe that God will reward those who keep His commandments and punish those who transgress them. I believe firmly in the advent of the Messiah, and if He retards his coming, I shall nevertheless expect him every day." Finally, "I believe in the resur-