

The Shroud of Turin : in light of first century jewish culture

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“It is not your job to finish the work, but you are not free to walk away from it.” - **Rabbi Tarfon**

Jewish culture during the first century was in a Diaspora mode. Since the reigns of King David and King Solomon, in the tenth and ninth centuries B.C. respectively, Jews actively began to colonize portions of Africa and the Mediterranean¹. Following the Babylonian exile and captivity, the events of which were immortalized in Verdi's opera, Nabucco, the demographics of the Jewish people started to change drastically. As a result of the imperialistic aspirations of Shalmaneser, Jews were forcibly dispersed into Babylon and subsequently into Syria, Egypt, Persia, Mesopotamia, and, in 175 B.C., into Bombay, India. After the Babylonian captivity, many Jews did return to the Jewish homeland, found the Samaritans, descendants of their own flesh and blood, to be heretics, rebuilt the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, and continued to dwell almost exclusively among what they considered to be their brethren, in an all-Jewish milieu². There were, however, those Jews who chose to remain in countries such as Persia, Iraq, India, Afghanistan, China, Egypt, Nubia, Tunisia, and Carthage, opting to uphold their age-old Jewish cultures and traditions in those predominantly Gentile regions³. Over the millennia since those dispersions, there were minor variations made as a result of Jewish adaptations to their new non-Jewish environments, but the Jews, on the whole, kept their Judaeo-Semitic cultural and physical ethnicities relatively intact. At the time of Christ, two thirds of the approximately eight million Jews of the ancient world lived outside of Judea and all of those Jews were obligated to go to Jerusalem at least three times per year for the Shalosh Regalim or three high holidays⁴. Alexandria and Rome were, by far, the Diaspora cities with the largest Jewish populations during the first century⁵. In Rome, the Jews constructed underground cemeteries in order to keep the noise of their emotional funerary tantrums under control. These underground areas, many which contained seven-branched candlesticks and other expressions of Jewish religious symbolism, were the forerunners of the catacombs that were later occupied by the early Christians of Ancient Rome.

There were always Jews in Egypt. At the time of Christ, Egypt was a haven for thousands of Jews, inclu-

ding the Holy Family: Jesus, Mary and Joseph. In the first century, approximately one out of every eight Egyptian residents was of Jewish ancestry and sixty percent of the city of Alexandria was of the Jewish race⁶. The Jews of Alexandria were active in commerce, shipping, manufacturing, agriculture, politics, the military, and this metropolis boasted a tightly knit religious judicial structure, one that was every bit as uncompromising as that which existed in Pharisaic Jerusalem. There were many interactions between the Jews of Egypt and first century Judea and these foreign Jews often went on pilgrimages to Jerusalem⁷.

According to Jewish law, shaatnez, the illegal combination of linen and wool within the same garment, was a law that was not to be compromised. During the first century, the Mosaic prohibition against mixed species still prevailed⁸. In Israel, the regions for the production of linen and wool (the Galilee and Judea respectively) were distances apart. Daniel-Rops cites the Talmudic reference to Judean women bringing wool to market and Galilean women offering their linen for sale in their region⁹. When a Jew purchased a fabric that was to be utilized for clothing, be it in Jerusalem or Nazareth or Antioch or Bombay or Rome or Cyprus or Alexandria or Tripoli or Fayoum in Upper Egypt or in China (where there was a substantial Jewish community descended from those who fled the Babylonian oppression), it was obligatory for him to ascertain that the cloth that was purchased for wardrobing purposes did not contain this illegal mixture of species. In the second century, the Mishnah in the Tractate of “Kelayim” ruled that, in the funerary process, the responsibility for acquiring a non-shaatnez cloth was dispensed with, since the dead person is no longer legally and morally responsible for the keeping of this law. That, however, was the second century when all sorts of loopholes and clauses were added to the body of Jewish law. The prohibition against shaatnez is explicitly for fabrics that were to be transformed into clothing items. It is important to note, nevertheless, that one never knows for certain when a fabric item that was originally purchased for non-wardrobe purposes would be used as an item of dress. In the Bible, one of Jesus disciples covers himself with a sheet, because he felt the

chill of the evening. While a sheet, if it is not worn, can legally contain shaatnez, if it ever covers the body at any particular time, that same fabric must be shaatnez-free¹⁰. For sheer reasons of practicality, all fabric, except for the fabric that was used to make the vestments of the High Priest of the Temple, ought not contain this mixture of species. Along those lines, it was understandable that, at the time of Christ, restrictions were placed upon the Jews against commercial interaction with Gentiles. These ordinances were not newfangled, but were in full force ever since Mosaic times¹¹.

I believe that there was an informal textile trade network that was in existence between the Jewish communities of the Afro-Eurasian Diaspora and their Jewish brethren in first century Israel, one that ensured the kashrut or legality of the fabrics that were in circulation among the Jews of that time. Trading exclusively in fabrics with Jews, in an era that was almost two millennia before the invention of electronic-microscopic tests for Shaatnez, would indeed minimize the possibility of mistaken "eye-dentify".

The ten lost tribes of Israël. Many scholars consider these tribes to be folkloric remnants of the forgotten majority of Jews that, since the Babylonian exile and dispersion, assimilated among the nations to which they gravitated and, eventually, settled, never to return. Benjamin of Tudela, a twelfth century traveler and chronicler of the folklore and cultures of the Jewish Diaspora, could best be described as "the Jewish Marco Polo". The Bnei Israel Jews of India, according to Tudela who observed their activities first-hand, were Jewish fundamentalists who, since the Babylonian exile, still observed the Sabbath, dietary laws, circumcision, and other festivals that were in existence among the Jews since Mosaic times; albeit, they had no synagogues¹². It is worth noting that the synagogue system did not exist as an official Jewish religious institution at the time of the Babylonian captivity, but appeared much later around the time of Christ. According to reliable sources such as Josephus, Philo, The New Testament, and the numerous remains of archaeological excavations in Israel, the synagogue, as an established Jewish institution, probably began in the first century¹³.

The first century continued to see demographic, cultural, and commercial interaction between the Jews of Ancient Israel and the Indian subcontinent. The Cochin Jews of India arrived en masse on the southwest coast of the Indian subcontinent after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD¹⁴. Talmudic and Midrashic literature also mention spices, perfumes, plants, animals, gems and textiles that either bear names of Indian descent or are native to the country¹⁵. It is interesting that the Indian saree, or traditional women's clothing that is actively worn by Indian women until this day, first made its appearance, as an item of Indian garb, during the first century AD and, since that time, has undergone little or no changes. The saree is an uncut, unstitched length of fabric worn draped around the body. The classic sari

measures six to nine meters long and one meter wide, measurements that seem to favorably compare with those of the Shroud¹⁶. In researching Indian fashion even further, I learned that, although the saree is worn in the Kerala district of India (the area that was a strong hub of Jewish immigration), the original attire of the region, however, was the off-white mundum veshti. This is a two piece set, a rectangle piece of cloth for the upper torso, worn draped over the shoulder. Another broader piece is for the lower part of the body¹⁷. Were the designs of the Indian saree and mundum veshti based on the Roman toga that the Jews of first century Palestine were well acquainted with and could have brought to the Indian subcontinent?

During the first century, China was in the midst of strong economic expansion. Commerce within China underwent a strong revival thanks to the abundance of rivers, canals and roads that China had. During the early part of the first century, under the Han Dynasty, the boundaries of economic development began a process of expansion and the Hans began spreading their economic influence into India, Asia Minor and a region known as Da Qin, the eastern Roman Empire. During the reign of Augustus, large amounts of silk reached the eternal city for the first time in history¹⁸. During that period, China traded actively with India, importing wool and fine linen from the Indian subcontinent as well as the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, to include Israel¹⁹. Rabbi Tudela wrote of long existing Jewish communities that were in existence at and before the time of Christ in Jewish Diaspora outposts such as Iraq, India, Egypt and China that supplied much needed dry good and agricultural imports into first century Israel. Although Ancient Palestine produced both wool and linen-flax in abundance, there was no reluctance among the Jews to import fabrics via caravans from other portions of the Mediterranean and from the East²⁰.

Petachia of Ratsibon, a twelfth century Slovakian-Jewish contemporary of Tudela, also delved into the cultures of the Jewish Diaspora²¹. In an account of his journey into Iraq, Petachia noted the religious garb of the Jewish men of Baghdad :

" In the city of Baghdad there are a thousand Jews. They walk about wrapped in cloth (...). They all walk about wrapped in their praying scarves of wool with fringes. " ²²

I find this remark significant, because Petachia subtly stresses the wool content of the prayer shawl, stressing that shaatnez was not in use, and also the fact that the prayer shawls contained fringes, just as they did at the time of Christ and for centuries before. In September of 1995, my husband and I, together with Dr. and Mary Whanger and members of C.E.S., the Valencia-based Shroud society of Spain visited the Israel Antiquities Museum in Jerusalem. In speaking with a senior textile expert, we were given the opportunity to see dozens of ancient cloths from the Canaanite period in Israel. These cloths had many elements in common, especially the

abundant use of fringes and stripes, usually the same color as the cloth, running along the width of the cloths much like the stripes and fringes on the Jewish prayer shawls that are used during liturgies and burials.

Looking to the customs of the little known Jewish communities of Asia Minor, Asia, Iraq, Morocco²³, India and Iran indeed has its wisdom. These Jewish communities are ancient, date back to Biblical times, and have left their cultural and racial marks on the Gentiles with whom they lived. It is very difficult, because of the strong influences of Hellenism within the Jewish communities of first century Israel and North Africa, to derive a clear picture of a purely Judaeo-Semitic Jewish culture at the time of Christ.

Around the time of Jesus, however, a more simplistic approach towards Jewish burials began to develop. Rabbi Gamliel, the mentor of the Apostle Paul, and, perhaps, the most distinguished Rabbi and teacher of his times, moved towards unadorned burials in seamless white linen cloths²⁴. His grandson followed and developed even stricter rules and regulations vis a vis Jewish burial vestments. Jewish chronicler, Jacob Ha'Cohen, in his medieval travels among the ruins of Ancient Israel, noted the following :

" The tombs of our ancestors in Tiberias extend about two parasangs and there are their caves as high as a house, and the burials are four cubits by four(...) because the Gentiles used to take the dead out of their graves, because *they wanted the golden threads with which their shrouds were sewn.* " ²⁵

This segment describes a period of Jewish cultural history in The Holy Land just prior to the modifications and changes in Jewish burial customs that evolved concurrently with the ministry of Jesus... and thereafter, particularly during Mishnaic times. If the raiding and looting of Jewish graves was common at that time, and let me stress that the very notion of someone tampering with a Jewish body or resting site, especially by a Gentile, is a most despicable and horrifying notion to the Jews, it is no wonder that there was a quick change of heart and tradition by rabbis, such as Rabbi Gamliel, in order to prevent any financial motive for plundering and disturbing the burial places of the deceased. It is all the more fascinating that this new movement and cultural shift towards simple burials began in and around the time of Christ and, if the Shroud is Jesus' burial cloth, there would be no treasures that would tempt a would be marauder to acquire it. Roland De Vaux's theory, that the Jews, during the first century, were buried " fully clothed " supports the fact that Jesus, according to Jewish burial custom, was covered before he was placed in the tomb²⁶.

In doing research into the first century Jewish aspects of the Shroud of Turin, one must, I believe, study the Jews from a comparative perspective. First century Palestinian Jews traded actively with their Jewish brethren in Egypt, Iran, Cyprus, Iraq, Asia Minor, India and China. Henri Daniel-Rops noted :

" The extension of the Jewish colonies in the Diaspora provided them with agents of their own nation everywhere: Babylon, Damascus, Alexandria, Ephesus, and later on in Rome. Their business was carried on with their cousins. " ²⁷

In Babylon, the Jews did not own land and, therefore, they were compelled to survive in careers that excluded agriculture. Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, noted that the Jews of Christ's time " did not delight in merchandise " and had no historical or ethnological attraction towards commerce, considering the fact that the cities in Israel were all inland and that the soil of Israel was so rich²⁸. The Jews during the first century, however, managed to overcome their inhibitions and engage in trade with their Jewish brothers throughout the Mediterranean and well into Asia. King Herod encouraged this international trade boom and established the port of Caesarea as a center for this new commercialization. Grain, notably wheat, was, probably, the chief item of commerce and the Palestinian Jews traded, basically, with either Greeks or Hellenized Alexandrian Jews²⁹. It was a known fact that the incense for the Temple in Jerusalem, an item that was non-negotiable, was imported from Arabia³⁰.

The Jews are not and have never been a seagoing people, unlike the Portuguese, another people of a mixed Afro-Semitic racial strain³¹. Zebulun, among the sons of Jacob, was designated the great mariner and the descendants of his tribe earned their livings from the waves. The sea is mentioned over two hundred times in the Bible, but the nautical ventures associated with it are closely associated with non-Jews such as the Canaanites. The waters off the Israeli coast are indeed forceful and challenging, due to the winds coming from Africa, and the tiny port areas that Josephus mentions are not substantial enough to encourage active maritime trade.

The Agunah is by definition a woman who is bound, according to Jewish marital law, to a husband with whom she no longer lives. In most cases, the husband disappears, dies without witnesses having seen him, or refuses to grant a divorce. If the husband is lost at sea, an open body of ocean, and cannot be found, the wife, who is now referred to as an Agunah, may not remarry. The Apostle Paul, a Jew well acquainted with Jewish law, did travel extensively by sea, to Greece and to Rome. He was, let us recall, not married and that makes a difference. If, on the other hand, the husband drowns in an enclosed body of water such as the Sea of Galilee, the wife is free to remarry. At the time of Christ, the Sea of Galilee was the focal point of much commerce in fishing, eg. Simon Peter, the fisherman. The Jewish people and the sea never developed a rapport and Josephus mentions that the Jewish merchants at the time of Christ would hire Greek, Phoenician and Roman shippers in order to conduct commerce that required water transportation³². The Jews, feeling as uncomfortable as they did with the open seas, preferred the hassle-free commerce of the caravans trekking through the deserts of Asia Minor and

the Eastern portions of Asia. This could explain the emphasis, in and around the time of Christ, on Jewish trade with Syria, Asia Minor, Babylon, Persia, India and even China.

It could very well have been, and this is a potential topic for a follow-up paper, that the linen cloth as well as the three-in-one herring bone twill weaving style of the Shroud, the latter of which I did not see among any of the ancient linen cloths that were shown to me by Israeli textile experts, originated in the host countries of the first century Jewish Diaspora. Could the fabric weave of the Shroud, however, have been a standard weave that was utilized in the garb of the Jewish High Priest of the Temple, as indicated in the Exodus 28:39 ? " You shall make the checkered tunic of fine linen. " ³³

In my studies of the Ancient Temple of Jerusalem, I noticed a strong similarity between the three-in-one herringbone twill of the Shroud and the required white, checkered style weave pattern of the garb of the High Priest. According to Mosaic Law, the garment of the High Priest was to be rectangular, seamless and its size was to be, and this is confirmed by Maimonides, twice the height of the High Priest ³⁴. The robe was designed without arms and, as the famous commentator, The Ralbag stated, " Part of it hung from behind him and part of it in front " ³⁵. Only a hole was to be cut for the neck, at the exact middle of the cloth. Along those lines, it is conceivable that the side-strip of the Shroud may have been cut away from the main body of the Shroud at the time of burial and used to bind the shrouded body. Symbolically, this binding might represent the sash of the

High Priest. It is noteworthy that when the radiocarbon sample was removed from the Shroud it was discovered that the side-strip had been completely removed and then sewn back onto the Shroud ³⁶. Jesus was, after all, considered by his followers to be a High Priest and the Apostle Paul consistently refers to Christ, especially in the Book of Hebrews, as a High Priest:

" You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek. " ³⁷

With Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, arranging and supervising the burial of Christ, one can imagine that he may have had enviable access to the storehouses of the fabric weavers of the Ancient Temple.

I am so thankful for the tireless Jewish chroniclers of the Middle Ages such as Benjamin of Tudela, Petachia of Ratsibon, and Jacob Ha' Cohen ³⁸. These historians, because of their persistence and Orthodox Jewish scholarship have kept alive and accurately documented the folkloric traditions, and cultures of the Jews of the Holy Land as well as the ethnologies of the Diaspora Jews of the Asian continents. It is the latter portion of the Jewish people who, because of their geographic isolation and social exclusion from the Jewish mainstream, practiced a purely Mosaic Jewish culture, one that is akin to the pre-Mishnaic-Talmudic practices that were typical of the Jews of the first century.

One last thought. Let us not forget that the first Sindonologist was not only a woman, but a Jewish woman. It was on that special Sunday morning that St. Mary Magdalene raised the first Shroud-related theory: " Perhaps it is the gardener. " ■

Notes

1) Kulanu (All of Us) Home Page, <http://www.ubalt.edu/www/kulanu/index.htmlx#access>, George E. Lichtbau, Jewish Roots in Africa

2) The Samaritans. It is important to take notice of the culture and folkways of the Samaritans, since they were, before the Babylonian exile, every bit as Jewish as the other twelve tribes. While I think that the possibility that the Shroud fabric came from the Samaritan communities of the first century is remote, because of the stigma of association with them, it is worth noting that, at the time of Christ, there was a lessening of animosity towards the Samaritans. Polish scholar, Henry Skrzynski in his book *The Jewess Mary* reminds us of the marriage of King Herod to a Samaritan woman and the half-Samaritan offspring that ensued. Christ, himself, in his parables draws a kinder and gentler image of the Samaritan people. Like the " Ten Lost Tribes of Israel ", the cultures and folkways of the Samaritan people are frozen at the time of the Babylonian captivity and, over the coming years, I will continue to study the ways of these little known spin-offs of the Jewish people.

3) George E. Lichtblau, *Jewish Roots in Africa*. Jews have settled in Africa since the days of King David and King Solomon (10th and 9th centuries BC.) Colonialism was one of the motives and, with the military backings of the Canaanites and

the Kingdom of Tyre, numerous settlements of Jewish artisans and traders flourished in North Africa, Egypt, the Arab Peninsula, the Horn of Africa and Persia. As a result of the Babylonian and Assyrian captivities in the 8th and 6th centuries BC, more resettlement of Jews in North Africa ensued.

4) William K. Klingaman, *The First Century: Emperors, Gods, and Everyman*, Harper Perennial, 1990, P.3

5) Henri Daniel-Rops, *Daily Life in the Time of Jesus*, Hawthorne Books, 1962, P.53

6) Encyclopedia Judaica, Keter Publishing House, Israel, P.479-507

7) William K. Klingaman, *The First Century: Emperors, Gods, and Everyman*, Harper Perennial, 1990, P. 1

8) Henri Daniel-Rops, *Daily Life in the Time of Jesus*, P.214

9) Ibid, P.245

10) The Mishnah, Tractate of Kilayim

11) Dr. Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Social Life*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Reprinted, 1993

12) Ibid

13) The Mishnah, Sanhedrin 10:3

14) " FAQ:Jews As A Nation, Jews of India " Soc. Culture. Jewish FAQ:Jews As A Nation website: <http://www.cis.ohio-state.edu/hypertext/f...ism/FAQ/07-Jews-As-Nation/faq-doc-lo.html>

15) Raphael Meyer, *American Asian Kashrus Services*, 1995, website: <http://www.kashrus.org/asia/cochin.html>

- 16) Orpa Slapak, *The Jews of India: A Story of Three Communities*, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, 1984.
- 17) Indian Fashion - An Overview:
<http://www.globalindia.com/fashion/fash-ov.htm>.
- 18) William K. Klingaman, *The First Century*, P.60
- 19) William K. Klingaman, *The First Century*, P.304
- 20) Daniel-Rops, *Daily Life in the Time of Jesus*, P.214
- 21) Elkan Nathan Adler, *Jewish Travellers in the Middle Ages: 19 Firsthand Accounts*, Dover Press, 1987, P.69. It is interesting that the name Petachia is a blending of two words «Patach» and «Ya» that mean God opened.
- 22) Ibid., P.69
- 23) Jewish Communities of the World Home Page. The Jewish community of Morocco dates back more than two thousand years. Jews have lived in Morocco since before Morocco became a Roman province. During Roman colonization, the Jews of Morocco lived peacefully with their Roman conquerors. Well established at the time of Christ, the Jews of Morocco could have also served in the trade-chain with the Jews of Israel. Ever since Solomonian times, the Jews of the African and, especially North African, Diaspora were actively involved in trade and commerce. George E. Lichtblau, *Jewish Roots in Africa*.
- 24) Rebecca S. Jackson, Hasadeen Hakadosh: The Holy Shroud in Hebrew, *CIELT Acts of the Symposium*, Editions De L'Oeil, 1993, P.27-33
- 25) *Jewish Travelers in the Middle Ages*, P.96
- 26) Roland De Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1961, P.56-57. De Vaux makes reference to pins and other ornaments that were found in first century Jewish tomb excavations.
- 27) Daniel-Rops, *Daily Life in the Time of Christ*, P. 245
- 28) Ibid., P.245
- 29) Ibid., P.245
- 30) Ibid., P.249
- 31) Ibid., P.255
- 32) Daniel-Rops,
- 33) Exodus 28;39, *The Old Testament*, Logos Bible Software.
- 34) Rabbi Shalom Dov Steinberg, *The Mishkan and the Holy Garments*, Toras Chaim Institute, P. 159
- 35) Ibid., P. 159
- 36) Ibid., P. 185
- 37) Hebrews 5:6, *The New Testament*, Logos Bible Software.
- 38) Note: Since Napoleonic times, most Jewish historical/archaeological/anthropological scholarship has been carried out by either Gentile or by non-Orthodox Jewish scholars. What is so vital about Tudela's, Ratsibon's, and Ha' Coben's work and that of the other Orthodox Jewish chroniclers of the Middle Ages is the fact that, as Orthodox Jews who underwent rigid Jewish training, they were uniquely qualified to recognize, evaluate, and record their findings.

Le Linceul de Turin : à la lumière de la culture juive du 1^{er} siècle

L'auteur montre que la dispersion des Juifs, commencée au X^{ème} siècle avant notre ère, avait répandu les deux tiers de la population jusqu'en Chine. Les Juifs avaient des cimetières souterrains à Rome et de fortes colonies à Alexandrie comme en Inde, et commerçaient (de préférence par voie de terre) avec tous les pays.

La loi mosaïque était partout respectée, notamment le précepte qui interdisait de mélanger le lin et la laine dans le même vêtement. L'auteur fait d'ailleurs remarquer que le lin était produit en Galilée et la laine en Judée.

Il fait aussi remarquer une analogie entre le Linceul du Christ et le vêtement du Grand Prêtre du Temple de Jérusalem, vêtement qui consistait en une pièce de tissu de lin pendant devant et derrière et percée au milieu pour laisser passer la tête.

Question de Gérard Nominé

Il a été dit hier que l'on imagine que la mère de Jésus-Christ a certainement essuyé le visage du Christ lorsqu'Il a été descendu de la Croix. Est-ce une coutume reconnue par les juifs à cette époque ou au contraire, n'était-il pas interdit de toucher ou de laver le visage du supplicié ?

Réponse

Oui, c'était tout-à-fait contre la religion et la tradition juives. Jésus, sur la Croix a dit, (du moins

c'est ma théorie), "pardonnez-leur, ils ne savent pas ce qu'ils font".

Il souhaite en fait que l'on pardonne aux romains, aux juifs, à tout le monde. En tant que juive, et parce que j'ai grandi dans la religion juive, je pense que de nombreuses erreurs ont été faites : Marie-Madeleine n'aurait pas dû venir près de cette tombe, aucune femme n'aurait dû être là.

Vous n'êtes pas sensé toucher un cadavre, seuls les professionnels sont habilités à le faire. Dans l'entourage de Jésus, la seule

personne qui le pouvait était Joseph d'Arimathie.

Question

Vous n'avez pas du tout parlé de la possibilité qu'il y ait eu deux linges différents lors de l'ensevelissement traditionnel juif.

Réponse

Je pense qu'ils utilisaient le linceul classique, celui que nous connaissons tous.

Ils auraient aussi pu utiliser un châle de prière pour le visage.