

The Hebrew Danites as the Greek Danaans

By John R. Salverda

The Seafaring Danites

The Danites were a band of rovers, they were not satisfied with the size of the allotment which the official coalition of the Jacobites had afforded them, around Zorah and Eshtaol, so they defied the priesthood of Phinehas, appointed a Levitical priesthood of their own, (directly descended from Moses,¹ not Aaron) and set out to found new lands. First they went up north, and, with the apparent approval, or at least the acquiescence of the Sidonians and the Upper Manassehites, they took the city of Laish, (This city, while the Scriptures, at Judges 18:7, say that it was “far from Sidon” itself,² was very close to the Sidonian capitol at the time, a place called Hazor.) killed all the Laishites, moved in, and called the place Dan, after their own tribal patriarch (See Judges Chapter 18). They also held the seaport of Joppa,³ and it must have been their friendly relations with the seafaring Sidonians that allowed them to build a fleet of ships there. Then, in the days of Deborah, war broke out between the sons of Jacob, and the Sidonians. It is likely that treaty obligations, agreed to by the Danites, called for a mutual non aggression pact, with the Sidonians (the Sidonians had already upheld their end of the bargain when they withheld retaliation against the Danites at the taking of Laish.). When the sons of Jacob threatened the Danites for their neutrality in the war, in accordance with the "Song of Deborah," (at Judges 5:17) the Danites, "lived in ships." These then, were

¹ Jdg 18:30 "... Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of Moses, he and his sons were priests in the tribe of Dan, until the day of their captivity." Some translations have "Manasseh," but, as Kimchi has said, the Jews suspended the letter, נ, noon, over the word מֹשֶׁה [Strong's H4872], [Strong's H4873], Moses, thus מֹנֶשֶׁה [Strong's H4519], as it is found in the Hebrew Bibles.

² Laish was not that far from Sidon, for it was said to be only about eleven miles away (Adrichom. *Theatrum Terrae Sanct.* p. 105.); Josephus says, "a day's journey" (*Antiqu.* l. 5. c. 3. sect. 1.).

³ Joppa was the capital of tribal Dan and was famed in ancient times for its shipbuilding industry. Ships sailed from Joppa to Greece. The Greeks were well familiar with the place and say that the "Danaan" Perseus, whose sons ruled there, came from Joppa.

the Danaans,⁴ who "fled" in their keeled ships, from their brothers, the sons of "Aegyptus," (the Jacobite) to live with the Inachidae at Argos,⁵ in the land of, what would come to be called, "like Canaan" (Mica+Cana, Mycenae).

The Marriage of the Danaids

The Greeks tell a story of how the Danaans, one of the main branches of the ancient Greek peoples, came from their Original homeland to settle with the Inachidae⁶ of Argolis. These Danaans, otherwise known as the daughters of Danaus, were fleeing from their cousins the sons of Aegyptus. Danaus and Aegyptus were brothers, the former having fifty daughters but no sons, and the latter having fifty sons but no daughters. Aegyptus was intent on marrying his fifty sons to the fifty daughters of Danaus, but Danaus and his girls wanted no part of any such wedding. H. J. Rose in his, "A Handbook of Greek Mythology" (page 272), has an interesting take on this wedding between cousins. He says, "This was of course the natural thing for them to do, by Greek law, for a girl with no brothers, ... an encumbrance on the estate, as Attic law called her, was by universal custom married to her next of kin." This is interesting because Rose has here shown us, that the Greeks dealt with the problem of inheritance, where the father has had no sons but only daughters, in a way that was very similar to the Hebrew law. For his comment cannot help but remind us of the story in the scriptures, about the daughters of Zelophehad.

The Daughters of Zelophehad

⁴ The descendants of Danaus, after whom the Danaans were named (Apollod. ii. 1, § 4, &c.).

⁵ "Aegyptus had fifty sons, and Danaus fifty daughters. As they afterwards quarrelled concerning the kingdom, Danaus ... built a ship, being the first to do so, and having put his daughters on board he fled. ... Thence he came to Argos" (Apollod. 2.1.4).

⁶ The Anakim who had earlier been chased from Hebron by Caleb had apparently gone to Greece where they were known as the Inachidae. Relations between the Danites and the Inachidae had improved by virtue of their, now mutual, strife with the sons of Jacob.

Zelophehad⁷ had, not fifty, but five daughters and no sons. None of them were married, at the time that Joshua and the chieftains were dividing up the land of Canaan. They complained in the presence of the high priest, that it would not be fair if the inheritance of their father were to be divided up amongst the other tribes. It was therefore agreed upon, so that a family might not lose its inheritance altogether, that in the case where there were no sons but only daughters, the girls could indeed inherit the property. Now, while the girls had gotten their inheritance, there were those who feared that they may marry men from other tribes thereby letting the inheritance be divided up among the other tribes anyway. In order to prevent this possibility, a remedy was decided upon whereby the daughters would have to agree to marry within their own clan. Then, hopefully, the girls would eventually produce sons of their own who could pass the inheritance down through their family line. While we are told about the girl's request to receive their father's inheritance, the Hebrew scriptures do not inform us as to what the daughters of Zelophehad thought about the forced marriage arrangement, this subsequent stipulation, would obviously not have been so favorably accepted by them as the original judgment was. Sure enough, in keeping with the comparison between the Greek and Hebrew stories, just as Hypermnestra and her sisters the daughters of Danaus were married unto their father's brother's sons,⁸ so we are told in the Hebrew scriptures at Numbers 36:11 "For Mahlah, Tirzah, and Hoglah, and Milcah, and Noah, the daughters of Zelophehad, were married unto their father's brother's sons."

Now, of course, the intent here is not necessarily to equate the story about the daughters of Zelophehad with the story about the daughters of Danaus, however, the similarities between the Hebrew and Greek laws in this regard, are certainly worth our notice. It should furthermore be here pointed out, that the Hebrew story takes place, chronologically speaking, in the days just prior to the Danite apostasy.⁹ Also noteworthy, is the fact that the daughters of Zelophehad, who are biblically referred to, at Joshua 17:6, as the daughters of Manasseh (they were in fact his great, great, great, granddaughters), were of the clan of Gilead. thus, they were associated with the Danites (the Greek Danaus) in the so called, "song of

⁷ Numbers 36:1-12

⁸ "They took as wives the cousins they had demanded" (Hyginus, "Fabulae" 168.)

⁹ Moses was still alive in the story of Zelophehad (Numbers 36:5), while the apostasy of the Danites was presided over by his grandson Jonathan (Judges 18:30).

Deborah," (Judges 5:17 "Gilead abode beyond Jordan: and why did Dan remain in ships?") as opposed to joining the sons of Jacob (the Greek Aegyptus) in their war against Sisera. Therefore, it does seem plausible, based upon the existence of the Greek tale concerning the marriage of the Danaids, that the Danites who left Israel in those days, could have brought with them, as one of the grievances justifying their departure, this story of their Gileadite Allies, which was indeed current at that very time. In fact, the Greek law, that parallels the Hebrew one, and which they apparently continued to follow in their new Grecian homeland, had only recently been introduced into Hebrew law just prior to their emigration.

The Original Homeland of the Danaans

The Greeks say that the Danaans came to the city of Argos and demanded their portion of royalty there. They claimed to be descendants of Io and therefore members of the royal family.¹⁰ (it does seem reasonable that, as descendants of Abraham, they could have pressed their partial ownership of Hebron, the parent city, as a "legal" claim to royalty over it's colony.) They had been chased from the land of Aegyptus, (the Jacobite) by their brothers, the sons of Aegyptus. To accomplish this emigration, they are said to have invented the keeled ship,¹¹ which enabled them to sail over the deep seas, and make their escape to Argos. The Greek claim that the Danaans invented the keeled ship, fits nicely with the Biblical claim that the Danites lived in ships, they were after all in possession of the seaport Joppa, where by all indications shipbuilding was a major industry. It is often said, by historians who have studied the matter, that the Phoenicians with their access to the cedars of Lebanon, one of the few trees which produces timbers large enough to be suitable for the task, were the probable inventors of the keeled ship. A simple reclassification of the Hebrew Danite, as a branch of the Phoenicians, makes this speculation fit the Greek myth.

¹⁰ "Our tale is brief and clear. Argives we claim to be by birth, offspring of a cow (Io) blest in its children. And the truth of this I shall confirm in full." (Aeschylus, "Suppliants" 274)

¹¹ "Then for the first time Minerva is said to have built a two-prowed ship in which Danaus could escape." (Hyginus, "Fabulae" 168.)

The Sons of Aegyptus

Neither does the Saga end here because then, in accordance with Greek mythology, the sons of Aegyptus also went to Argolis, following after the delinquent Danaans, to bring them back and punish them for their treachery. But it took them a bit longer to get there, leapfrogging from port to port along the coasts, in their less seaworthy unkeeled barges. By the time the sons of Aegyptus arrived at Argos, the Danaans were already established, with a degree of royal power, and the Argolian army was ready to defend them. Now, the sons of Aegyptus, a mere posse in the face of an army, could not enforce a return upon the Danaans, and because they were told not to return empty handedly,¹² they decided to quit their homeland back in Israel, and resolved to remain in Argos. The sons of Aegyptus sued for their portion of the royalty at Argolis on the same basis that the Danaans did, and they were recognized as well.

The Myth of Lynceus and Hypermnestra

This brings us to a story that seems to reflect the circumstances that brought about an end to the war between the northern Canaanites of Hazor and the Jacobites, which must have been what was known to the Greeks as, "the myth of Lynceus and Hypermnestra" or, otherwise known as, the myth of "The Danaids." The Jacobites were not united in their war against the Canaanites, as we have pointed out the Danites did not participate in this war, and they were admonished by Deborah for their complacency, so were the people of Gilead who also apparently sat out the hostilities. The term "Gilead" was an often used alternative name for the phrase "upper Manasseh," which makes a plausible origin for the name "Hypermnestra," for the Hebrews were fond of assigning a figurative woman to represent national or tribal groups, and the word "hyper," is the usual Greek term indicating "above" or "beyond," as in beyond a river. Also, as if there weren't

¹² "When Aegyptus knew that Danaus had got away, he sent his sons to pursue his brother, bidding them kill Danaus or not return to him." (Hyginus, "Fabulae" 168.)

enough coincidences between these two stories already, the Greek name "Lynceus" means the same thing in Greek, that the Hebrew name "Laish" means in Hebrew, namely a "small lion." Therefore, as allies in opposition to the Jacobite aggression, it is not completely unreasonable, that the tribe of "upper Manasseh," who spared the city of "Laish," during the war against Canaan, may have served as the origin for the Greek myth wherein Hypermnestra, refusing her charge to kill him, spare the life of Lynceus. Perhaps they were considered contractual partners, as if under a treaty. It is plausible, Is it not, that such a treaty or contract, might be symbolized, in Greek mythology, as a marriage. At least we don't have to rely exclusively on the Hebrew story of the daughters of Zelophehad, as the exclusive origin for the Greek myth about the wedding of Hypermnestra and Lynceus.

Jael and the War against Sisera

Those Jacobites who made up the coalition of the willing in the struggle against Canaan, were able to win the war through the efforts of a very brave woman named Jael.¹³ Jael was not a Jacobite instead she belonged to a race, known as the Kenites, who were, at that time, also at peace with the Canaanites. However, the Kenites were on friendly terms with the sons of Jacob as well, in fact, Zipporah, the wife of Moses was a Kenite (also called Midianite and Ethiopian), and the apostate Danite priesthood were her descendants. Jael herself was a relative who could not have been too far removed from the Danite priesthood, for it is noted right in the Scriptural account of the war, that her family was descended from the house of Hobab, who is therein called the father-in-law of Moses.¹⁴ It may have been this Kenite relationship to the Danite priesthood, combined with Danite treaty obligations mentioned earlier as necessitated by the close proximity of the Danite stronghold at Laish to Hazor the chief city of the northern Canaanites, that gave the Canaanite General Sisera the false sense of security that he must have had in order for him to take a nap in the tent of Jael.

Jael deluded the weary Sisera completely and when he had fallen asleep, she

¹³ Judges 4:17-22, 5:24-27

¹⁴ Judges 4:11

took a pin and ran him through so that he died. Now, how many stories are there in which a man is beguiled into falling asleep by, and in the presence of, the woman who intends to murder him, and then while the man is sleeping the treacherous woman runs him through with a pin and kills him? I can think of only two, one is the Scriptural account of Jael and Sisera, and the other is the Greek myth that is known as "The Danaids." Furthermore, it is not only this very particular story that coincides between the Scriptures and the myth, but also the placement sequentially of each tale. Just as the story of Jael and Sisera comes at the end of the war that saw a falling-out between the Jacobites and their brothers the Danites, who "dwelt in ships," so to, the Greek myth of the Danaids is the story of the subsequent reconciliation between the progeny of Danaus, who fled in ships from their brothers the sons of Aegyptus at the time of their quarrel.

Hypermnestra's Danaids and Jael's Water carriers

It should be said at this juncture that, while the scriptural story makes the female assassin Jael out to be a heroine, the Greek myth of the Danaids is coming to us from the complete opposite point of view, for the Greek heroine Hypermnestra is famed for not doing, exactly what Jael did do. In fact the Greeks must have looked at the deed of Jael as an act of the most heinous kind of treachery, for they have assigned to the other forty-nine sisters of Hypermnestra, those who did commit the deceitful act, an extra punishment of frustration in Hades. They are compelled to unsuccessfully fill a leaky water jar forever¹⁵. Thus the Danaids can always be recognized on pottery, coins, and other works of art, by the fact that they were always carrying their ever present water jugs. It is interesting to note, in this regard, that according to the song of Deborah, it was the water distributors¹⁶ who had received considerable benefit from the actions of the perfidious Jael, furthermore, when Sisera came to the tent of Jael, the first thing he asked for was to be served water. At any rate, in vilifying the treacherous Jael it does seem as though the Greeks felt the need for some reason, perhaps the one here outlined, to defame

¹⁵ "the others are said to carry water to fill a leaky jar in the Lower World." (Hyginus, "Fabulae" 168.)

¹⁶ Judges 5:11 ye that are delivered from the noise of disturbers among the **drawers of water**; there shall they relate righteous acts: O Lord, increase righteous acts in Israel: then the people of the Lord went down to the cities.

the entire water carrying guild as well.

The Hebrew Origins of Mycenaean Civilization

Are we to conclude that these two very similar traditions, containing complete series' of parallel motifs, each sprang up independently and without cross contamination between these two cultures, the Greek and the Hebrew, separated only by a well worn path across the Mediterranean sea? We know that pottery traversed between Greece and the Levant, so why are we so reluctant to identify the popular stories that were told in each place? This, perhaps wouldn't be so difficult to admit in itself, but in fact I think that we shall find, that it was more than simple cross contamination, it was a more direct contact, for the original waves of immigration to Argolis in Greece, the forefathers of the Mycenaean civilization, were the sons of Anak, closely followed by the Danites and the Jacobites, but of these, predominantly the Danites, so much so, that throughout the writings of Homer, he usually refers to the Peloponnesian Greeks, by the general term "Danaans."

The land of Egypt, or the Land of Jacob?

At this point, the question naturally arises; Did the Danaans come from, the Scriptural home of the Danites in the land of Jacob, or as the Greek myth seems to indicate, from the land of Egypt? If there is a simple answer to this question, it is this; The Greeks had a poor knowledge of world geography. Furthermore, our understanding of Greek geography leaves much to be desired. While, on the one hand, it is true that we moderns now call the land of the Nile, Egypt, and we did get this habit from the Greeks, it is not so certain, on the other hand, that the original ancient Greek myth tellers themselves, had this same interpretation. For the ancient myth itself, which we have culled from Apollodorus (2.1.4-5), runs thusly; "Belus (the father of Aegyptus) remained in Egypt, reigned over the country, and married Anchinoe, daughter of Nile, by whom he had twin sons, Aegyptus and Danaus, but according to Euripides, he had also Cepheus and Phineus. Danaus was settled by

Belus in Libya, and Aegyptus in Arabia." Here we can plainly see, that Aegyptus was not a King of Egypt, but of some other land in Arabia. The Greek myths go on to tell us, that Aegyptus in his Arabian land, conquered a nearby people who were known as the "Melampodes," and that it was this territory, that he went on to name after himself, "Egypt." The term, "Melampodes," often interpreted as meaning "black footed," is thought by many to be another name for the Egyptians themselves. Certainly Aegyptus would not have had to conquer the people whom his father was ruling over. However, if we are to look for a people who's land neighbored the land of Arabia, and who were not already subjected to Egyptian suzerainty, then I suggest, that we look to those ancient rebellious slaves from Egypt who lived on the border of Arabia, the Jacobites. And since the people who lived in the land of Jacob at that time, were the same people who once served as slaves, stomping out the mud bricks for the Pharaoh's building projects, the term "Melampodes," or "black footed," could easily have been a derisive reference to them, as famed for their muddy black feet. They had as we know, come from the land of the Nile, so the Greek confusion between the Melampodes and the Egyptians wouldn't seem to be so far fetched after all. (Do we call the calf god, "of Egypt," because of the Greeks? Perhaps we should change that to, "Jacob's calf god.")

Furthermore, it should be pointed out that the term "Egypt," was not the popular nor usual name for the land of the Pharaohs. By any measure, the most popular name was "Misir," as in its equivalent Hebrew name Mizraim. The Hittites, the Assyrians, and the Chaldeans, like the modern Arabs all used this name, and not the name "Egypt." In fact the Greeks were aware of this name for the land of the Nile from a very early date as well. The ancient Greek script, called linear B, which was used by the Danaans, and has been deciphered as the language of Mycenaean Greek by the modern philologists, does contain the usual term, in the form "Misirayo," which has been translated to mean, "the Egyptian." The term "Aikupitiyo," has also been found to occur in the same linear B script, and it has been translated as well to mean, "the Egyptian." Of course, these modern scholars¹⁷ are only following a well established usage and offer no explanation as to why the Mycenaean Greeks should refer to the Egyptians by two different names in the

¹⁷ Yamauchi, "*Journal of the American Oriental Society*" Vol. 85, No. 3 (Jul.-Sept., 1965), 415-418

same script. Allow me to offer an explanation, The Mycenaean word, "Aikupitiyo," means, just as it so closely resembles "Jacobite," they were like the people of Misir, but not exactly. This resemblance between the two words, is striking, but this in itself is not enough to identify them with each other, however, combined with the similarities between the stories in the Hebrew scriptures, and the myths of the Greeks, we may draw some more definite conclusions.

We know from the Scriptures that the Jew wandered to the land of the "Jacobite," but the myths have Io wandering to the land of "Aegyptus." And, while we know that the Danites had a family quarrel with their brothers the "Jacobites" which caused them to retreat into their ships, the myths have the Danaans fleeing by ship from their brothers, the sons of "Aegyptus." We notice the error, but we especially notice the consistency of it, it is apparent that the earlier myths had it right, but the later speculation misplaced the name of Jacob on the land of the Nile. If this last point should seem like a circular argument remember, the evidence for identifying Io and the Danaans, with the Jew and the Danite, are strong enough to stand on their own. Identifying Jacob with Aegyptus is a conclusion based upon these stronger evidences, it is certainly not supposed by me to be proof of the Io and Danaus theories.

The Aftermath

So far we've only covered the few short generations between Joshua's expelling of the Anakim, and Deborah's report of the Danite apostasy, many other similar waves of Greek immigration by the descendants of Io, were to follow. For it was about 100 years after the days of the Danite apostasy, that the sons of Perseus immigrated to Argolis from the city of Joppa in Phoenicia, and these more recent Danites had, in the mean time, developed their own version of the events of Hebrew history. These sons of Perseus, those whom we will be referring to as the Perseids, have been attributed with building the walls of Mycenae and as such, can be placed into actual historic chronology. For these walls have been found by archaeologists and dated in synchronization with Egyptian history. The Perseids knew that they

were related to the earlier established Danaans by race, but as to the story of Io and Hermes they must have had their doubts. It is apparent that they had neither the ability nor the desire to abolish the earlier mythology, so they simply added their own version of history onto it, as if their stories were subsequent events. They gave a son to Hypermnestra and Lynceus whom they called "Abas," (plausibly meant to represent Abraham,) which is the usual Hebrew word for "father," and they made this Abas to be the father of their own mythological history, which they began at the story of a Acrisius and Proetus. Of any story attributable to the Greek mythological character who was known as Abas there is little to report. It was said by some that he was a great warrior, but there is no report of his participation in any war, some say that he invented the shield, or that he had a magic shield which one only had to display, (a bit like the Ark of the Covenant,) and the enemy would be miraculously disbursed. Not to discount the story of his shield, but there was a much more important role to be played by Abas, which was that of a genealogical connector between the earlier Danite/Inachidae dynasty and the subsequent Danite/Perseid one.

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