

INDIA AND THE LAND OF ISRAEL: BETWEEN JEWS AND INDIANS IN ANCIENT TIMES¹

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The ties between India and Israel, like many relationships, began behind the scenes and ended up in the open. The purpose of this article is to evaluate the historic ties between the two countries and the two peoples, the Jews and the Indians, over the course of approximately 2000 years. Links start in the tenth century BCE (if not earlier), and are examined up to the time when the Jews were mentioned in the brass plates from Cochin, written around the year 1000. Sources will be reviewed chronologically, from their beginning in the Bible, through the Hellenistic literature and, finally, in the Rabbinic-Talmudic literature.

A. In the Bible

1. India at the End of the World

India is mentioned only one time in the Bible, in the Scroll of Esther. The scroll begins and ends (Chapters 1 and 9), with a description of King Ahasuerus' reign (Esther 1:1): "Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus, this is Ahasuerus which reigned, from India even unto Ethiopia, over 107 and 20 provinces." That is, the Persian kingdom spread over a large number of countries, and the Persian Empire spread from India in the east to the Land of "Kush" in the west, the largest empire in the world until its time.¹ Indeed, even if—as claimed—the number 127 is only typologically important, the substance is real: the Persian Empire spread over almost all the known world's land mass, as it was understood in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE.

In light of this description, it is now possible to obtain different views from the literary perspective and, more confusingly, the geographical perspective, though both have the same intent.

The geographical description of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:10-14) mentions four rivers: the Pishon, the Gihon, the Euphrates, and the Hiddekel. It says:

And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads. The name of the first is Pishon: that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold: and the gold of that land is good: there is bdellium and the onyx stone. And the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia. And the name of the third river is Hiddekel; that is it, which goeth toward the east of Assyria. And the fourth river is Euphrates.

¹ Translated from Hebrew by Danielle Sharon and Erica Meyer Rauzin.

The description in Genesis does not mention India at all, however—as will be explained—the land of the Havilah is India (that is, part of it), as already stated by an Aramaic translator,² while the river Pishon is the Indus. Examining this description in detail, starting with the issue of the rivers,³ proves this view.

Based upon this view of the world, the “Garden” is actually the populated world. There are four real rivers in it, two in its center, even if the word “center” is not mentioned, and two more rivers surrounding (“that circle”) the world.

Therefore, Gihon is the Nile flowing north, while the river Pishon is the Indus flowing south.⁴ Thus, a kind of “symmetry” and “roundness” is formed in the map of the world, similar to the map described in regard to Ahasuerus’ reign. The “center” of the world is in Mesopotamia and in this center are two big rivers. Far away on each side is a “circling” river that flows to the sea, going about and around, until it comes out again. It appears that the world—that is, the Garden—is surrounded by water.⁵

At least on the surface, this geographical approach seems to disagree with the Bible of the land of Israel, due to the fact that Mesopotamia is located in the center, even if this is not specifically mentioned. In fact, the scriptural portion on the flood, which follows the portion on the Garden of Eden, makes it evident that Noah’s Ark rested on the mountain of Ararat, which is close to Mesopotamia (and not, for example, on the summit of Mt. Hermon). This description expresses the Mesopotamian background of the story. Apparently, this phenomenon is a consequence of the beginning of the Book of Genesis being part of the Wisdom Literature, which was prone to move more easily from one place to another. Anyway, there is no point on insisting on a picture of the world where there are two rivers in the middle and two more “surrounding” that world.⁶

The Gold

In essence, the double marking of the word “gold” in the scriptural portion (“there is gold there and gold”), can be interpreted as a literary style. However, it is more likely that this double marking is intentional and was meant to emphasize the importance and the value of the gold coming from the land of Havilah.⁷ Given both the double marking of “gold” and the description emphasizing the richness of Havilah, the text appears to hint of a wonderland with enormous riches. This description says Havilah is the land that exports bdellium, the land of the onyx stone.⁸

Remains of approximately 100 gold mines were found in upper Egypt, in Nubia (in Egyptian, the land of gold). However, the land of Havilah did not export only gold; it also exported bdellium and onyx. Clearly, parts of upper Egypt (Sudan or Ethiopia) could not qualify as candidates for the “land of Havilah.” Nevertheless, Sumeric and Akkadian documents make it appear that in the third millennium BCE various places in Mesopotamia were already importing gold and other merchandise in ships from a place named Dilmun, described in documents as, “a wonderful place on earth.”⁹ In the second millennium BCE, Dilmun sent Ur, which was in the south of Mesopotamia, not only gold but also silver, brass, necklaces of semi-precious stones, ivory combs, and pearls. Even though Dilmun was never clearly identified, it

probably was one of the cities in the valley of the Indus.¹⁰ Reputably, gold was exported much earlier from India, particularly from the Indus Valley.¹¹

During the reign of Darius in the sixth century BCE, India was considered the richest country in the Kingdom of Persia, bringing 360 talents of gold as tax revenue every year.¹² This literary evidence joins other archeological findings, which clearly show, from the remains of hundreds of mines spread throughout India, the intensity of metallurgical activity in ancient India. Mines for a variety of metals—gold, silver, brass, iron, lead, etc.—date from the fourth millennium BCE onward.¹³ When Rome conquered Egypt in 30 BCE, it imported gold from India.¹⁴ Clearly, India continuously supplied gold for many generations, although the Egyptian gold mines did not.¹⁵

The close biblical link between gold and the land of Havilah is historically supported by India's reputation as a gold exporter at that time. Even if one cannot conclusively identify the geographical location of the land of Havilah from this evidence alone, it is clear that it was in India, somewhere in the region of the valley of the Indus.

The Bdelium (*B'dolakh*)

Different interpretations have been offered as to the meaning of *b'dolakh*. Is it a type of a precious stone, a crystal or another species, or is it a type of perfume, an essence emanating a pleasant aroma?¹⁶ The traditional interpretation that it is a precious stone probably comes from Rav Aibu, a Talmudic scholar who lived in the land of Israel in the third century CE. Rav Aibu said *b'dolakh* was not a perfume, but a stone.¹⁷ However, he probably did not know that the word *b'dolakh* already existed in Akkadian and meant "perfumes." Thus, biblical scholars are inclined to interpret "*b'dolakh*" as perfume (indeed, the *shoham* is described as "stone"),¹⁸ and some scholars believed that it referred to perfumes from plants growing in southern Arabia and Somalia. However, this geographical observation seems to be only an extension of a mistaken opinion prevalent in Rome during the first century CE, according to which cinnamon (and, most probably, the other perfumes) originated in Arabia and Somalia.

Today, it is certain that most perfumes did not grow there, but grew in India and Sri Lanka. The peoples of Arabia and Somalia were, instead, the middlemen in the perfume trade.¹⁹ Even if Somalia and southern Arabia did grow perfumes such as myrrh and frankincense,²⁰ disproving India's role as a source of perfume would still require proving that the people of Mesopotamia maintained commercial activities with these distant locations, and not with the people of India even though India was much closer. India and Mesopotamia had a well-documented trading relationship because Mesopotamians could trade with India by water—a cheaper option than the "Ishmaelite Caravan"—by sailing along the shores of the Persian Gulf. This also avoided the risk of sailing the open seas, which were subject to monsoon winds.

For generations, India was known as an exporter of perfumes due to its unique weather conditions and vegetation. In the first century CE, many varieties of bdelium perfume, imported from India, were well known²¹ in Bactria and other places, suggesting that exports during the later period reflect earlier reports. Therefore, bdelium brought from the land of Havilah is perfume.

The Onyx Stone (*Shoham*)

Modern researchers identify the *shoham* as onyx, or malachite, among other opinions.²² This stone is mentioned in the Bible not only as an export from the land of Havilah, but also as a stone placed in the tunic and breastplate of the High Priest.²³ It is difficult to say anything clear about it. Possibly, the reference is to a "family" of semi-precious stones,²⁴ not to only one particular variety of stone, as is the custom in our days. However, even if the reference is to one particular stone, or even to a specific semi-precious stone, so little is mentioned about it in the Bible that it remains in question. One thing is clear: India was and still is an exporter of semi-precious stones, diamonds, and more, particularly the south of India, the location of four port cities. These include Muziris (that is Cranganore), located about 30 kilometers north of Cochin, which was established later.²⁵ Muziris exported ornamental stones—a variety of beryllium stones, sapphires, and diamonds—found in the middle of the country.²⁶

In view of the above, the geographic description of two circling rivers surrounding the world (among them the Pishon, which circles the land of Havilah) like the description of the export products of this country (gold, perfumes, and precious stones) necessarily leads to the conclusion that the land of Havilah is India. Probably, the reference is not to the entire Indian sub-continent, but to classical India, that is, the cultural center in the valley of the Indus, from whence the name "India" derives.

Gold, bdellium, and ornamental stones could be obtained not only in India, but also in Ethiopia, so the possibility still remains that the land of Havilah is in Ethiopia, except for one other comparison. For many generations, India attracted people of the west as tourists, merchants, or conquerors, not only because of its uniqueness, but also due to its richness and business opportunities. In contrast, Ethiopia was hardly ever conquered over the generations. This fact indicates that the land the Bible calls "*Havilah*"—the land it grants a good reputation for gold, bdellium, and ornamental stones—must be India and not Ethiopia, and that Ethiopia is only mentioned "thanks" to the confusion between it and India, not only in the Middle Ages,²⁷ but also much earlier.²⁸

In any event, the biblical narrator is aware that India is located at the end of the world: on one side is Kush, which is upper Egypt (Sudan and Ethiopia), and on the other side of the world is the land of Havilah, which is India.

2. Maritime Travels from the Land of Israel to India

The land of Israel first enjoyed a period of prosperity during the days of King Solomon in the tenth century BCE.²⁹ After the biblical narrative describes the richness and greatness of the King, as well as his vast network of connections with Pharaoh, King of Egypt, and with Hiram, King of Tyre, one encounters the following description:

I Kings 9:26-28	II Chronicle 8:17-18
And King Solomon made a navy of ships in Ezion-geber, which is beside Eloth, on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom. And Hiram sent in the navy his servants, shipmen that had knowledge of the sea, with the servants of Solomon. And they came to Ophir, and fetched from thence gold, 420 talents, and brought it to King Solomon.	Then went Solomon to Ezion-geber, and to Eloth, at the seaside in the land of Edom. And Hiram sent him by the hands of his servants ships, and servants that had knowledge of the sea; and they went with the servants of Solomon to Ophir, and took thence 450 talents of gold, and brought them to King Solomon.

Scholars differ about the location of Ophir, and their uncertainties are difficult to clarify.³⁰ The narrative does not provide enough data about the commercial question, "What did the slaves of Solomon trade in exchange for the gold?" But, by analogy to what is known from a later period, it is possible to assume that Israeli and Phoenician exports included products which the two neighboring countries excelled in: glass (glassware, necklaces, and raw boulders),³¹ purple dye paint (from Phoenicia), grain, wheat, wine, raisins, dried figs, olive oil, dates, honey, almond nuts, brass (from the land of Israel and Edom), and others.³² However, the large quantity of the gold, approximately 13 metric tons in modern weight, could help indicate Ophir's location. Such a large quantity of gold leads to the assumption that it came from a process of continuous gold production, and not from an occasional extraction of gold. This large amount of gold suggests that this must refer to India, and not to Africa—where there were gold mines, but no urban coastal center that was capable of trading in gold.

The biblical author, while describing the coming of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon, remembers to mention additional details about the delegation to Ophir:

I Kings 10:11-12	II Chronicles 9:10-11
And the navy also of Hiram, and the servants of Solomon, which brought gold from Ophir, brought alium trees and precious stones. And the King made of the alium trees terraces to the house of the Lord, and to the King's palace, and harps and psalteries for singers: and there were none such seen before in the land of Judah.	And the servants also of Hiram, which brought gold from Ophir, brought alium trees and precious stones. And the king made of the alium trees terraces to the house of the Lord, and to the king's palace, and harps and psalteries for singers: and there were none such seen before in the land of Judah.

This indicates that the vessels brought back not only gold, but also precious stones (the Indian origin of which is described above) and prime quality timber. While it is possible that timber was imported to the land of Israel from Africa, the word "alium" has been identified as a transliteration from the Sanskrit *valium*.³³

Those who believe that Ophir was located in India include Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities*, pp. 4, 6, 8) and the Church Fathers, Eusebius and Hieronymus. In *Le*

Septuagint, the city's name was translated as Soupheir as well as Ophir, and it seems that the reference is to Sopara, somewhat south of Bombay in India. Given that, Ophir is actually Sopara, one of the most important port cities in the Roman Empire period.³⁴

More so, King Solomon's vessels reached another location, as it is written in Kings and Chronicles:

I Kings 10:22	II Chronicles 9:21
For the King had at sea a navy of Tarshish with the navy of Hiram: once in three years came the navy of Tarshish, bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks.	For the King's ships went to Tarshish with the servants of Hiram: every three years once came the ships of Tarshish bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks.

That is, Solomon's fleet had two destinations: the first—Ophir, a destination reached, as is specifically written, from Ezion-geber. The second expedition's port of departure is not specified. Moreover, the second destination (rendered "*Tarshish*" by scholars) remains anonymous, possibly on purpose, as written in the Book of Kings.³⁵ On the other hand, in the Book of Chronicles, Tarshish³⁶ is mentioned as the country of destination, a place whose identity will be clarified below.

Forget the apparent possibility that this second fleet, unlike the first fleet, was the fruit of maritime cooperation in the Mediterranean—a more in-depth investigation will show that this was impossible. Remember that Phoenician dominance of the Mediterranean didn't require the support of King Solomon. Consequently there was no advantage in a joint Judeo-Phoenician expedition in the Mediterranean Sea or beyond the Pillars of Hercules (Gibraltar).³⁷ Moreover, the streams and wind patterns in the Mediterranean Sea are relatively mild, so a round trip that lasted such a long time in the Mediterranean Sea—or even outside of it, sailing around Africa or to the north of Europe—seems improbable.³⁸ On the other hand, cooperation in the Southern Sea looks more reasonable because other instances of cooperation are known from other sources. A port location (Ezion-geber) is not cited, probably because the author assumed this "minor" detail was insignificant, due to his lack of experience and understanding.³⁹

The translation attributed to Jonathan writes that this trade was with Africa. Rashi and Rabbi David Kimhi share this opinion, but the issue requires a more in-depth analysis. Scholars past and present tried to find a hint of the geographic destination of these marine voyages, but they considered only part of the available information, while ignoring the broader reach of data in this work.

First, "*ani-tarshish*" most probably describes the type of vessels used, and not the destination of the voyage. That is, wood for the vessels was brought south (like the cedars brought for the Temple in Jerusalem) and the vessels were built according to the "model" set by "Tarshish." That is, they were not built as local fishing boats or local merchant vessels, but as commercial cargo ships, which nowadays would be called "Trans Atlantic" ships. Such ships would sail from Tyros to Tarshish—which possibly was in Asia Minor or somewhere else (Sardinia)—and their name derived

from that locale. The vessels built in Ezion-geber were built according to the appropriate model for a long-range voyage.⁴⁰ That this refers to a Phoenician ship model is self-explanatory. Clearly, due to their characteristics, these vessels were not adequate to face the monsoon winds, just as the sailors aboard them, even if very experienced in the Mediterranean Sea, had no such experience in the Indian Ocean, which required very different seamanship than the Mediterranean.⁴¹

These facts, sailors, and ships, also explain why each voyage took three years. Even if the biblical author was not meticulously precise about the length of the voyage, and "rounded up" the time, evidently it was a very long sailing time (compared to the scale of much later periods). However, before discussing the actual length of the voyage, it is important to note a few observations about the wind patterns and the sailing routes from Egypt or the land of Israel in the Indian Ocean approximately 1000 years after King Solomon.

Around the first century BCE, it became possible for a vessel sailing from Egypt to India in July under good conditions (ship, captain, sailors, and luck), to return with cargo from India within a little less than a year, because—among other reasons—the ship could now take advantage of the monsoon winds, which had not been possible before due to lack of technical expertise in shipbuilding. Only ships with a relatively large volume were capable of exploiting the monsoon winds to make the trip in a year, which was considered a very short duration at the time. Until this development, it was impossible to sail westward for several months of the year.⁴² No standard Phoenician ship was adequately built to dare the Indian Ocean's winds. Vessels of the period before the Roman Empire had no choice but to follow the same, along-the-shore navigation patterns used by vessels in the Mediterranean Sea. That is, a vessel leaving Ezion-geber would sail to the south until it came to Yemen, continue east along the southern shores of Arabia, cross the Persian Gulf and continue south along the shores of the Indian sub-continent. Not only was this a longer route than the one taken by later period monsoon-ships, but the crews of the ancient ships had to be careful with the unfamiliar winds. One suspects that the maritime navigational talent of the famous Phoenician sailors of antiquity helped them avoid the dangers of unknown wind patterns. Considering the danger the monsoon winds presented to the Phoenician vessels—due to the longer route they had to travel, their relative slowness, and their inability to sail in bad weather—a three-year return voyage (including a significant number of months in which the sailors idled) looks like a very reasonable duration for ships departing from Ezion-geber to Ophir on the western shores of India and returning safely to their bases.⁴³

If Ophir was in Africa, the long duration of the voyage has no plausible explanation. Moreover, no archeological evidence supports the existence of real ties between the Middle East and Zimbabwe in Africa.⁴⁴ The identification of India as the destination of Solomon's and Hiram's maritime expeditions in Tarshish ships was accomplished due to the "small" detail describing the extremely long duration of the voyage to that country. Analyzing the products imported from that mysterious country—gold, silver, ivories, monkeys and parrots—strengthens the assumption that it refers to India.⁴⁵

In terms of metals, gold was covered above. As for other metals, the silver and lead mines of Nal in Baluchistan (north of the valley of the Indus) were already

known by the fourth millennium BCE. Ancient silver, lead, and zinc mines also were known to exist in six other regions of India. Clearly, therefore, the export of silver in ancient times fits India more than any other country, definitely so, when the silver is exported with gold.

To comment on the exported animals, both from the zoological and the linguistic points of view, note that the Hebrew words for "monkey" and "parrot" are unique. According to linguists, they originate from Tamil, a sort of dialect of Sanskrit.⁴⁶ "Monkey" and "Parrot" are the first written Tamil words that are in use today, although some cast doubt on this etymology (albeit, without offering a better explanation). Therefore, it is appropriate to examine these animals from the zoological point of view.

When examining the animals and other items on the export list, one could also, at least apparently, consider Africa as the possible exporter of ivory, monkeys, and parrots. Investigation proves that it is not. The Hebrew word "*shenhav*" (ivory) is from the Egyptian, so one cannot deduce anything about ivory's origin from its name. Therefore, when discussing ivory, one must look instead at the elephant itself, and consider the differences between Africa and India in regard to elephants and the trade in elephants. The Asian elephant was domesticated in India thousands of years before. Therefore, its trade in ivory is similar to trade in the products of other livestock, like cow's milk or sheep's wool. In contrast, the African elephant was not domesticated, and trade in its ivory was in the hands of hunters and, thus, incidental in nature.⁴⁷ In ancient times, eastern Africa had no city-kingdom along the Indian Ocean that could consolidate this occasional flow of ivory brought by hunters. But Abu, that is Elephantine, in upper Egypt, could do this, and derived its name from doing it. That is, ivory that arrived in the land of Israel in an orderly fashion through marine merchants could have only come from India, not from Africa.

The case of the Tukki teaches nothing, whether the reference was to the parrot known as such in the modern Hebrew language, or whether the reference was to the peacock, as some scholars believed (and perhaps rightly so). However, the monkeys brought in ships could better hint as to the homeports of the vessels that brought them. Indeed, there are monkeys in India as there are in Africa, but these monkeys are significantly different. As among elephants, the Indian monkey can be domesticated, even if not completely, while the African monkey is a wild animal. During early generations, both Africa and India exported wild animals to different places, but the essence of the question is the type of the monkey. If the reference is to a wild animal, then it must have either been tied or caged in a safe place so that it would not harm people, or so that it would fight people, like the exotic animals that Rome imported from Africa,⁴⁸ and somewhat like the handling of different wild animals, among them monkeys, being sent from Egypt to Mesopotamia.⁴⁹

The Indian monkey is, uniquely, a pet, which is why it was exported for many generations, and still is. This monkey helps harvest coconuts and, in modern times, even helps handicapped people. Given this, did Solomon's seamen bring other pet animals, such as the parrot, or domesticated animals, such as the elephant, or did they bring wild animals, those dangerous to people? No evidence exists that the land of Israel had caging facilities for animals until the arrival of Hellenistic culture, as is evident in the Bet-Guvrin theater. Since India exported monkeys, peacocks, and

parrots for generations, it is reasonable to believe that the monkey brought by Solomon's sailors was from India—this being the long-tailed monkey, the same monkey Egypt imported from the land of Punt.⁵⁰ The Indian monkey is small and brings only pleasure and fun to animal lovers, as well as being entertaining during long, lonely sailing days. However, the African monkey, a dangerous animal, could only interest zoologists; its only place is in the zoo or in the wild. So we can conclude that the monkeys that Solomon's sailors brought came from India and not from Africa.

In summary, the thrust of this entire database and of each data element indicates that Solomon's expedition reached India. This data is further strengthened by the emergence of a sort of an Indian "export profile," as a consequence of India's climate and ocean. This profile fits what is known about India from a variety of sources and from different periods. Due to India's relative advantages over many other places in the world, the profile shows a continuity of export activity through many generations.

King Jehoshaphat

About 100 years after King Solomon, in the ninth century BCE, Jehoshaphat, the son of Asa, reigned in Judea. He is considered one of the greatest Judean kings. After consolidating his power in the south of the country (as it is written about him in I Kings 22:49), Jehoshaphat made Tarshish ships to travel to Ophir for gold. However, the ships got destroyed at Ezion-geber.

This short and concise verse teaches us that King Jehoshaphat probably tried to follow King Solomon, his great-grandfather, but couldn't. The ships that broke down in the southern port probably indicate maritime activity in this region. It seems that the ships were anchored at port and a strong, unexpected wind smashed the vessels against each other, or pushed them to the shore so strongly that they were ruined. This further testifies that, at this time, the people of Judea lacked maritime expertise. They lacked experience with the special wind patterns of the Bay of Eilat and, needless to say, of the Indian Ocean. In reality, the final fate of these ships was already set from their inception. Note the difference in the maritime activity between Jehoshaphat and Solomon. King Solomon maintained a broad network of connections and cooperation with Tyros in many areas, including maritime cooperation, while no evidence exists of such cooperation between Jehoshaphat and Phoenicia. The silence of the narrative about such cooperation is significant. The following verse strengthens the lessons learned from the destruction of the ships and is illuminating because it was written right afterward (I Kings 22:50): "Then said Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, unto Jehoshaphat, 'Let my servants go with thy servants in the ships.' But Jehoshaphat would not."⁵¹ That is, the King of Israel—whose father married Jezebel, the daughter of the King of Sidon, who probably could help him in this area where Phoenician sailors were experts—rejected the offer of help on the spot for reasons of prestige and politics, reasons that turned out to be wrong after the ships broke down.⁵²

No more attempts were made, even later, to develop a port city in the south of the land of Israel. Maritime activity was renewed in this area only in the twentieth century, in the era of steamships, with the establishment of the state of Israel.⁵³

The story of Jehoshaphat's maritime failure only shows, by comparison, the strength of the successful aspects of King Solomon's venture, a success that remained unequalled for many generations. At the same time, the driving force behind these maritime activities was gold. However, the political ability to achieve this goal was inconsistent and, clearly, no continuous ties were maintained between the land of Israel and Ophir, that is India. The scarcity of details about Ophir in the historical memory of the biblical authors is noticeable. From the point of view of the Bible, and of modern researchers, the various names of different countries on the Indian sub-continent, thousands of miles away from the land of Israel, were destined for oblivion.⁵⁴

3. The Importation of Perfumes from India and Sri Lanka

Gold is not the only import for which a land of origin, in this case India, is not mentioned. The lack of citations of countries of origin is an evident problem in relation to other products mentioned in the Bible, particularly perfumes.

The bride's description in the Song of Songs 4:13-14, says: "Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard, spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices." India was the country of origin of at least three of these perfumes: calamus, spikenard, and cinnamon.⁵⁵ To these add the "*cassia*" (Psalms 45:9), which is made of the shell of a tree of the cinnamon family.⁵⁶ Specific testimony about perfumes being exported to the land of Israel from India and Sri Lanka exists from the Roman period (see below), and so this is obviously not just a later innovation. Nabataean Arabs brought the perfumes to the land of Israel, but they neither knew nor told about the origin of the perfumes, therefore the name of India is not mentioned concerning such perfumes as "Spikenard-India." Since no similar product existed, contemporary observers had no need to mention its origin.

Due to the similarity between Indian love songs and the Song of Songs (which precedes the Indian songs by hundreds of years), and due to the mention of Indian perfumes in the Song of Songs, some believed that the Song of Songs was influenced by Indian literature,⁵⁷ more so, because the authorship of this book is attributed to King Solomon, whose connections to India were described above. However, this opinion seemingly has no basis in fact. Love songs exist in any place where the human race lives, and one must not assume that the author of the Song of Songs knew that the perfumes he described came from India. This theory has other problems, including the probability that King Solomon did not compose the Song of Songs in the first place, but this is not the venue to discuss them.⁵⁸

Cinnamon and calamus are mentioned in the description of the sacred oil ointment in the temple (Exodus 30:23-25). Possibly calamus is also a perfume from Sri Lanka.⁵⁹ However, in all of these cases, the origin of the perfumes is not actually mentioned, just as the origin of the precious stones in the temple is not mentioned. This is because the perfumes and the stones reached the land of Israel by desert routes without leaving us the identity of their country of origin. Also, the fact that the Temple's rituals required the import of things from so far away only emphasizes that, in the first millennium BCE, or maybe even earlier (in Canaanite temples), the land of Israel received a continuous supply of perfumes from India. The investment

involved in the importation of perfumes was much smaller than the one involved in importing gold. If importing gold was the enterprise of kings and emperors, importing perfumes was considered a small-scale activity that didn't demand the large capital investment required to import gold.

B. In the Hellenistic Literature

Josephus Flavius relates a story attributed to Clearchus of Soli, a pupil of Aristotle, in regard to Aristotle's meeting with a Jewish sage. According to tradition, this was the first (known) encounter between Jews and Greeks. In *Against Apion* (A, 177-181) it is written, approximately:

[And Aristotle said:] "True, that [man] was a Jew from his origin, from Coele in Syria, however, they [the Jews] are descendents of the Indian philosophers, and as they say, the philosophers in India are called *Kalanim*, and in Syria [the philosophers are called], Jews..."⁶⁰

An in-depth research project, dedicated to the "discovery" of the Jews by Aristotle, clarified that this is most probably not a true story. No historical proof exists of any encounter between Aristotle and Jews. Moreover, Clearchus related this story as taking place between 345 and 347 BCE, notwithstanding some anachronisms that are connected by the name "Kalanim" (after Kalanos, the Indian gymnosophist). Alexander the Great did not know any Jews until his expedition in 327 BCE. Thus, even if the story is untrue in the strict historical sense, the question still stands: how did it come into anybody's mind to see the Jews as descendents of "Indian philosophers?"⁶¹ Whether this is a good story, a joke, or a philosophical fairytale (in the hypothetical struggle among different philosophical schools), even if it is not historical, it is bound to reflect a certain reality. The question being asked is: how could such a mistake as identifying the Jews with the Indians⁶² happen to Aristotle or Clearchus (or to the one whose words Clearchus related)? Thus, the following discussion is aimed at "defending" Clearchus, and explaining the reasons for his mistaken view that the similarity between the Jews and the Indians is significant enough that they would be considered one people, descendent of the other. Clearly, this is not an intent to "reconstruct" Clearchus' thoughts, because that can be accomplished, if ever, only when more portions of his lost works are discovered. Nonetheless, the aim here is to explain the breath of views and ideas in the Greek world in the second half of the fourth century BCE, a world in which—as will be explained below—it was possible to assume that Jews and Indians were people of the same nation.

Two possible approaches to the similarity between Jews and Indians are the resemblances among their social and dietary customs and the resemblance between the geographic locations of their settlements.

1. The Resemblance in Customs: Social Stratification, Purity and Impurity, and Diet

The western observer who describes India is usually very much impressed by its unique social structure, a society based on castes.⁶³ The existence of different castes that do not mix with each other and that observe distinct customs is a well-known

reality in Indian life today; with some variations, it was also a known reality in the fourth century BCE. This system bore no resemblance to fourth century Greek society; however, Jewish society in the land of Israel at that time did have many characteristics of a socially stratified society. The Mishnaic teachers taught in the Mishnat Kidushin 4:1:

Ten castes came up from Babylon:

Priests, Levites, Israelites, Impaired priests, Converts, Freed slaves, Mamzeri, Netini, "Silenced ones," and Foundlings.

Priests, Levites, and Israelites—are permitted to marry among one another.

Levites, Israelites, Impaired priests, Converts, and Freed slaves—are permitted to marry among one another.

Converts, Freed slaves, Mamzeri, Netini, "Silenced ones," and Foundlings—are all permitted to marry one another.⁶⁴

According to the opinion of the Mishnaic teachers, Israel's stratified society—particularly its stratified marriage rules—came from the fifth (or fourth) century BCE, the days of the Babylonian immigration. Even if this tradition requires validation from the historical point of view—to what degree is it reliable?—the Talmudic literature has more examples that testify to this social stratification, as well as to the tensions that arose because of it.⁶⁵ Clearly, one cannot know the precise situation in India or in the land of Israel in ancient times, but the Greeks could have seen the existence of social stratification (such as in the status of the permanent priests, even those who were not necessarily linked to the temple's rituals) as two phenomena, deriving one from the other.

The rigid, socially stratified structure that existed in different degrees continued, not only in the area of marriage, but also in the adherence to purity and impurity in everyday life. This differs from Greece, where purity and impurity applied only when visiting the temples. But, it extended to Indian and Jewish dietary restrictions, which had no counterparts in Greek culture. Greek eating habits varied, but the Greeks recognized almost no "forbidden" foods in the Indian or Hindu religious sense. The main Greek food restriction was based on the Hypocrite medicine.⁶⁶ The exceptions were a small minority of Pythagoras' disciples, or Orphaic groups, who refrained from eating certain foods in a manner resembling Jewish customs. Pythagoras spent decades in the east, in Egypt and Mesopotamia,⁶⁷ so it may not be a coincidence that later authors thought that he also stayed in India. Nevertheless, a Greek would have looked with astonishment at Indians or Jews who refrained from eating meat served to them, and would have probably regarded their abstention as deriving from the same (ethnic-religious) source.

Moreover, it is possible that social stratification left its marks, both in India and in the land of Israel, on the clothes of the different classes, as it transpires from Rabbi Meir, a Mishnaic teacher of the second century CE (or this may be an addition by later editors). Rabbi Meir said to Avnimus the Gardi, "As we found there were a number of markets in Jerusalem and they did not mix one with the other, a market for kings, a market for prophets, and for priests and for the members of tribe of Levi

and for that of Israel, they were foreigners in the way they dressed and in their markets, what these would wear the others wouldn't."⁶⁸

While it is difficult to determine to what extent this is a historical description, it is necessary to mention the notion of "priesthood garments." Even if this idea doesn't exist as a permanent expression in the Bible, but only in the Talmudic literature, it nevertheless clearly reflects a social reality wherein stratification of the classes was recognized in clothes that only higher social classes (i.e. priests) were allowed to wear.⁶⁹ The markets also had foodstuffs that were sold only to priests, or only to the members of the tribe of Levi.⁷⁰ This clarifies why "groups of priests" ate by themselves, and why members of Israel could not join their meal.⁷¹ Based on earlier law, Jews were careful not to eat with bastards, and to avoid any social ties with them, as it is written (Deuteronomy 23:3): "No bastard will come among the people of G-d." This means that strict prohibition of social exclusion was regarded far more severely than Mishnaic sages' prohibition about marriage.⁷² Perhaps social and halachic forces suggest the historic background reflected in Rabbi Meir's tradition. Clearly, social stratifications (or castes, in modern language) were present among the Jews in terms of marriage, socializing, eating, dress, and the strict application of purity laws. Apparently, these examples were sufficient to convince an outside observer, such as a Greek, that a real resemblance existed between the life cycles of Indians and Jews in the ancient times and that Indians and Jews could belong to the same people.

Which of these elements attracted Clearchus' attention and caused him to believe in the existence of an ethnic connection between Jews and Indians? Evidence presented here demonstrates that he could have arrived at this conclusion. Though it may look improbable at first glance, it definitely becomes more plausible after deeper analysis. However, a geographical gap of thousands of kilometers still separates India and the land of Israel. This gap looks like a real barrier against any attempt to connect Jews and Indians. In light of this dilemma, one must examine the geographical puzzle.

2. Geographical Distances: The "Expansion" of the World

How could a "mix up" occur between Jews residing in the land of Israel and Indians residing in India, located thousands of miles away in the east? Even if one assumes that the Jews resembled the Indians in their social customs, one still cannot ignore such a large distance. That matter requires a separate explanation.

First, note that modern astrophysical thinking is divided on whether the universe is of a fixed dimension or is expanding. In comparison, the size of our world, as far as it is known, is fixed. However, during the progress of human history, the world "expanded" twice in human perception. That is, the reality did not change, but twice mankind's understanding of the size of the world changed. The first time came during the days of Alexander the Great,⁷³ and the second occurred in the sixteenth century with the discovery of the "new world." Before the world "expanded," the distances among places were perceived differently than any child knows them to be today.⁷⁴ Thus, the following makes an attempt to explain what happened in this area in the sixteenth century, a subject relatively well known in research. The

"expansion" of the world in the sixteenth century is comparable to what probably happened in the fourth century BCE.

In 1492, Columbus traveled west to find India. Until the day of his death, almost 13 years later, he thought that he had reached China instead. During the sixteenth century, it became clear that Columbus really had discovered a new continent, and that the distance between Europe and India was far bigger than had previously been thought. Only in the sixteenth century did it finally become clear that the world is a globe, an idea that had floated, of course, in the human consciousness thousands of years before, but only as a philosophical and astronomical supposition.

In the sixteenth century, it became clear that the world had "expanded" in size, and myths that were thousands of years old slowly disappeared from people's minds. It is a known phenomena that looking at a distant object causes a mistaken evaluation of the actual distance between the observer and the observed object. By analogy, observers from Europe looking west found the distance to India was greater than they thought. Suddenly, India moved both further away and closer to Europe. After a few years, this same "distancing" caused the breakthrough that allowed the circling of the Cape of Good Hope from the west eastward, and later the circling of the globe from the east westward. This change in mankind's perspective of the world is very well known, but—in this frame of reference—it is worth mentioning that many researchers in the sixteenth century were certain that the Native Americans were the descendents of the ten lost tribes.⁷⁵ That is, the geographical mistake, even if later corrected, was still bound by an ethnological mistake.

A similar process occurred in human consciousness of the world and its size with the discovery of India during the travels of Alexander the Great. Until the fourth century CE, Europeans (that is Greeks) thought India was at the end of the world. However, Alexander's conquest of northern India brought about a better understanding of the distances and directions of the ancient world.⁷⁶ When Alexander the Great—Aristotle's pupil—went to conquer India, he hoped to find the sources of the Nile, and only later realized his mistake.⁷⁷ During the same period, these geographical notions were unclear even to those who could afford the best education, including Alexander, who was taught by Aristotle.⁷⁸

The world, or the western world-view, "expanded" twice, as the knowledge of new land discoveries made scholars aware of the world's real size. The first time was in the fourth century BCE, within the first or second generation after the discovery of India. That shift in perspective was smaller than the one that occurred in the sixteenth century, within one or two generations of the discovery of North America. Until these discoveries, the European inhabitants of the west had a mistaken view of the east, based, of course, on the knowledge available to them at the time. In both cases, the world "expanded," and in both cases, Jews were considered to be already present in those distant places. This period of geographical-ethnological mistakes could not have lasted very long and, within a generation or two after the geographical discovery of either India or North America, it became impossible to link the Jews to those wonderful places. Therefore, Clearchus' words could have been written only during one possible period: the days of Alexander the Great or shortly afterward, precisely when the east "opened" and Greece became aware of India and of the Jews.

C. The Talmudic Sources: Under the Roman and Byzantine Rule

With the conquest of Egypt, under the Roman rule in 30 BCE, a real change occurred in the commercial ties between Rome and India.⁷⁹ Even before the conquest, Egypt served as a natural, intermediary between the exporter—India, and the importer—Rome, due to special growth conditions in India and Sri Lanka that did not exist elsewhere. However, under the rule of the Roman Empire, the ties between Rome and India became closer.⁸⁰ This explains the increase in merchandise and Roman coins discovered in India, especially in southern India.⁸¹ With these circumstances and, probably, with the strengthening of Egypt, in general, and Alexandria, in particular, as the intermediary between India and Rome, there was also an increase in the merchandise that reached the land of Israel from India. Thus, the people of the land of Israel enjoyed the same Roman prosperity (except for local uprisings, which cost the lives of thousands of people in the land of Israel). Even if some trade between the land of Israel and India passed, in general, through Ptolemaic Egypt, another part of it arrived via Arab and Nabataean caravans which transferred merchandise either from southern Arabia or the region of Eilat. The next section presents a number of testimonies and examples of imported products that reached the land of Israel from India.⁸²

1. Imports from India

Spices and Medications

Among the many products imported from India, the spices and perfumes were particularly famous.⁸³ These were a natural extension of Indian exported goods from earlier periods. In addition to spices, medicines also reached Rome from India.⁸⁴ The Indian influence on Rome was so large that it is possible to identify the influence of Indian medicine on Roman medicine in the first century CE.⁸⁵

Most probably, all the pepper and cinnamon mentioned in Talmudic sources was imported from India. Even if there are sources indicating that cinnamon was grown locally, the special climatic conditions needed for growing cinnamon and pepper⁸⁶ hint that these products were not grown in the land of Israel but reached it as finished imported products.⁸⁷

High Quality Cloth

The description of the High Priest's ritual during the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) includes details about his clothes, which he used to change during the performance of these rituals.

In Mishnah Yoma 3:7-8 it is told:

They brought him white vestments. He dressed and sanctified his hands and his feet. In the morning he would don Pelousion worth twelve *maneh* and in the afternoon Hinduyin worth 800 *zuz*. These are the words of Rabbi Meir. But, the sages say, in the morning he would don (garments) worth eighteen *maneh* and in the afternoon worth twelve *maneh*—altogether 30 *maneh*.⁸⁸

On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest wore "golden clothes" (as this garment collection is called in the Talmudic literature), his most magnificent clothes.