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The Stick of Judah and the Stick of Joseph, Part IV

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The Stick of JUDAH and the Stick of JOSEPH

Part IV

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THE sticks around which the scrolls of the law were rolled were always regarded as holy and treated as scepters.¹⁰⁶ It will be recalled that nearly all commentators point out that the sticks of Ezekiel are in some way or other scepters. The scrolls of the Law were used by the kings of Judah as other kings used scepters, being "kept near his throne and carried into battle."¹⁰⁷ "The scroll itself," we are told, "is girded with a strip of silk and robed in a Mantle of the Law," while the wooden rod had a crown on its upper end, like the mace or scepter of a king. "Some scrolls," says the Jewish *Encyclopedia*, "have two crowns, one for each upper end."¹⁰⁷ These honors show the Jewish scrolls of the Law are the same given to the royal herald's-staff or scepter in other parts of the world. "At the feast of the Oschophoria," at Athens, for example, "the herald's staff was crowned with garlands, but not the herald himself."¹⁰⁸ As in the ancient North, "the staff was a willow bough always cut from a living tree, and was never allowed to wither or dry up"—which exactly recalls the blossoming rod of Aaron, which withered when Israel fell from grace.¹⁰⁸ Among our Norse ancestors this rod was taken from place to place, and at each place to which it

went, a roll-call was taken and a notch cut on the rod, which was the king's own staff. "The king was represented by the bailiff of the Hundred carrying a ward-staff. It was the staff (not the bailiff) which represented majesty and received the honours."¹⁰⁸

The peculiar honors bestowed upon the sticks of the Jewish Law-scrolls show by their nature that the sticks themselves were regarded originally as the bearers of the law. But once parchment had been rolled around these sticks (and the antiquity of this custom may be surmised from the fact that all official scrolls of the Law should be on the skin of *wild* beasts),¹⁰⁹ could they still be brought together like tallies to make one stick? The accompanying illustration shows an actual application of this idea: to an edict of the Empress Wu, her successor, the Emperor Tai Tsung (763-779 A.D.) wished to add a supplement of his own, incorporating it in the original law. The two rolls, each with one stick in it, are here seen placed side by side and bound

The two rolls, each with one stick in it, are here seen placed side by side and bound together as one by a silken cloth, just as the roll of the Jewish Law with its two sticks is "girded with a strip of silk."

(After J. Lechler, *Vom Hakenkreuz* [Leipzig, 1934], p. 74.)

together as one by a silken cloth, just as the roll of the Jewish Law with its two sticks is "girded with a strip of silk" when it is rolled up to be put into the tabernacle.¹¹⁰ There are two rolls having different designs on them and of different colors, showing that originally the scrolls do not have two sticks to them, but only one apiece.¹¹⁰ This suggests the origin of the scroll in the single message-stick with the message-scroll wrapped around it, as well as the probability that in Ezekiel's day the scrolls were still of the primitive one-shaft variety. That the scroll-sticks of the Greeks and Romans were derived from message-arrows is indicated by a number of things. Instead of having convenient handles at the bottom and smooth knobs at the top, the roll-sticks had points at both ends which made them resemble the well-known double-headed thunderbolt, the scepter of Zeus and the best-known of all rods of office.¹¹¹ That the resemblance is not accidental appears not only in the impractical arrangement of the thing and the identification of scroll-rods with scepters, but likewise in the name given to the points, *koronis*, Latin, *cornua*, usually explained as referring to the shape of the sharpened ends. But these do not resemble horns, and the name probably has the same origin as that of the little arrow-marks often used in the marking of scrolls by their makers, called *ceraunia*, "little thunderbolts."¹¹¹

We have seen that the heroes of Israel identified themselves as emissaries of the Most High by bearing his rod before the eyes of those to whom they were sent, Jew or Gentile. In this connection the rod is also interchangeable with the scroll, for in the Middle Ages every Jew was required by Jewish law to carry a scroll of the Law with him at all

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symbol was regarded by the early Christians as a thing of great significance and secrecy), what is the means by which Judah is actually thus distinguished, i.e., what is the real equivalent of the rod? It is the Bible, of course. In figurative language the Jews will recognize the Messiah by examining the rod; "search ye the scriptures," said the Lord, "for they it be that testify of me."

The identity of staff and scripture was noted by the earliest and best informed of the Christian historians. For the great Eusebius the sticks of Ezekiel represent the Old Testament and the New Testament.¹¹⁵ A century and a half earlier Irenaeus speaks of the (hidden) meanings of the sticks as "hidden from us, for," he says, "since by the wood we rejected him, by the wood his greatness shall be made visible to everyone, and as one of our predecessors has said, by the holy reaching out of the hands the two people are led to one God. For there are two hands and two nations scattered to the ends of the earth. . . ."¹¹⁶ There is every indication that the Saints of the early Church regarded the teaching of the sticks and the gathering as of great secrecy and great significance, the meaning of the whole thing being later lost.¹¹⁷ The later Fathers took the usual allegorical liberties in dealing with Ezekiel 37.

(To be continued)

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¹⁰⁷Ibid.
¹⁰⁸F. S. Burnell, "Staves and Sceptres," *Folklore LX* (Dec. 1948), p. 165.
¹⁰⁹Jew. Encycl.
¹¹⁰J. Lechler, *Vom Hakenkreuz* (Leipzig: Kabitzsch, 1934), p. 74, fig. 6.
¹¹¹F. Cabrol & H. Leclercq, *Dictionnaire d'Archeologie Chretienne et de Liturgie*.
¹¹²Jewish Encl., loc. cit.
¹¹³Clement Alex., *Paedog. I*, in *Patrol. Graec. VIII*, 324.
¹¹⁴In *Patrol. Graec. XLIV*, 1031 and *XLV*, 1250.
¹¹⁵Eusebius, *Demonstr. Evang.*, in *Patrol. Graec. XXII*, 745.
¹¹⁶Irenaeus, in *Patrol. Graec. VII*, 1171.
¹¹⁷Though modern critics fail to detect anything of great importance or mystery in the rods of identification, for the earliest writers of the Church they were regarded as objects of great symbolic significance, conveying a message of real, if hidden, importance: Migne, *Patrol. Graec. VI*, 681, n. 43.

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