

Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum

7

Aryeh Kasher

The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt



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herausgegeben von
Martin Hengel und Peter Schäfer

7

The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt

The Struggle for Equal Rights

by

Aryeh Kasher



J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck) Tübingen 1985

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In memory of my parents
Maniya and Joseph Kasher

Preface

The Jewish Diaspora has been part and parcel of Jewish history since its earliest days. The desire of the Jews to maintain their national and religious identity, when scattered among the nations, finds its actual expression in self organization, which has served to a rampart against external influence. The dispersion of the people in modern times has become one of its unique characteristics. Things were different in classical period, and especially in the Hellenistic period, following the conquests of Alexander the Great, when dispersion and segregational organization were by no means an exceptional phenomenon, as revealed by a close examination of the history of other nations. Colonists — Hellenic and others — dotted the Mediterranean and Euxine basins with hundreds and thousands of colonies. Eastward migration in the Hellenistic period has turned into common sight, and attempts were made by the authorities to encourage it. Groups of immigrants were on the whole shown an attitude of utmost consideration, and they were enabled to maintain their ancestral traditions, and to organize themselves in their own religious, social, and political frameworks.

From the beginning of the Ptolemaic period Egypt was the destination of a great variety of immigrant groups, among which Jews were not absent. Their basic right to “live by the Law of their Fathers” was liable to generate many legal difficulties. Had every ethnic group been granted the permission to maintain its laws and usages entirely intact, we should have heard of a tremendous legal disorder in Egypt as well as in countries in a similar position. As it would be unreasonable to assume that people could keep all litigation within their own group, it seems plausible that the basic right to keep old traditions was limited in certain areas.

The question of the legal status of Egyptian Jews deserves treatment in a wider context which is not restricted to Jews only, and which comprises the question of the legal status of other groups. It is generally agreed that one of the most important criteria for the civic stratification of Egyptian population is ethnic origin. It will be

pointed in the sequel that many Jews mentioned in official documents have various other (non Jewish) *ethnica* beside their names. Research has shown that these were *pseudo-ethnica* and that they had a functional significance. It is therefore important to find out to what extent was their civic stratification modified by this functional classification.

It is a well known fact that modern scholarship has focused its interest on the problem of the civic status of Alexandrian Jews. The main question was whether the Jews of this *polis* were or were not its citizens. The relative abundance of sources about this particular area seems to have stimulated the absorption in this question still further, since it has been widely assumed that Alexandria could be treated as model for Jewish civic rights in other parts of the Hellenistic and Roman Diaspora. No scholar has so far challenged the assumption that the struggle of the Jews for their rights was in fact the struggle for citizenship in the *polis*. The main evidence for this was adduced from the writings of Josephus, and to a lesser degree from those of Philo. The fact that Jews styled themselves citizens (*πολίται*) and Alexandrians (*Ἀλεξανδρεῖς*) has been reckoned the ultimate proof, and there has been almost no one who has sought a different meaning behind these terms. Josephus' terminology with regard to this subject, viz. *ισπολιτεία*, *ισονομία*, *ισοτιμία*, *ισομοιρία*, *ισοτελεία*, has strengthened this impression, but almost no attempt has been made to get to the bottom of this legal terminology. Scholars have varied in their conclusions according to their evaluation of Josephus as source: those who believed his veracity regarded the Jews as citizens in the *polis*, whereas those who suspected him of apologetic falsehood denied the Jews any claims to such a status. The discovery in 1924 of *P. Lond. 1912*, containing Claudius' Letter to the Alexandrians, strengthened the position of the latter and deepened their mistrust of Josephus' truthfulness. The document appeared to them as plainly contradictory to an edict quoted under Claudius' name by Josephus (*Antiquitates*, XIX 280 ff.).

Leading the ranks of these sceptics was the German philological school, whose prominent representatives Wilrich, Wilcken, Schubart and Laquer, attacked with eager enthusiasm other papyrological finds in order to expose Josephus' lack of credibility, and were not always innocent of antisemitic motivation. Their profound learning and their world-wide reputation added weight to their view. Their fundamental conclusions have so far not been contested.

Among modern Jewish scholars their most faithful follower has been A. Tcherikover, though he has managed to purify their theories of stains of antisemitism. On the basis of their conclusions he erected the edifice of his own investigations, revealing like them profound scholarship equipped with a sound and enticing logic. Adopting the method of historical analogy he projected the Jewish struggle for "emancipation" in the 18th and 19th Centuries backwards to the Hellenistic and Roman period. The Jews emerged as a national minority struggling for equal civic rights, the Alexandrians keeping their own ranks close, to prevent Jewish infiltration. For him this was the real essence of the "Jewish question".

The fault of this method is evident. The term "war of emancipation" was coined in a strange and remote historical reality from which it would be dangerous to conclude about classical antiquity. Furthermore, it will be shown later on, that no source provides an explicit piece of evidence that the Jews aspired to citizenship in the *polis*.

The political and the municipal organization in the period under discussion was strongly linked with the municipal cult. Religious apostasy was therefore involved in obtaining full citizenship, and it is doubtful whether Jews were willing to surmount this obstacle. Their struggle for equal political rights does not necessarily have to be interpreted as one for citizenship in the *polis*, and it is unfortunate that no other possibility has been examined.

The purpose of the present study is to suggest a new interpretation of the whole problem, and to try to demonstrate that the equality which the Jews strove to obtain is to be conceived as an equality between two separate political bodies, the Jewish community (*πολίτευμα*) and the Greek *polis*. In other words, the Jews fought for the right of self organization within the *polis*, on an equal footing with the Greeks, without this right being dependent on the *polis*, but on the central government. The Greeks in truth attempted to prevent this from happening, and to bring the authority of the *polis* to bear on all its inhabitants.

The discussion will be chronologically limited to the period up to the Jewish insurrection under Trajan (115-117 A.D.). This period is characterized by continuity of orderly and organized communal life, interrupted only by temporary shortlived episodes such as the riots under Caligula and Claudius (38-41 A.D.) and at the times of the great insurrection in Judaea (66-71 A.D.). Another reason for the

particular interest of this period stems from the fact that it witnessed no far reaching demographic changes. Nor was there any significant change in the status of the Jews and in the system of their basic rights. Yet, in spite of this chronological limitation, earlier and later sources will have to be consulted for the sake of comparison and clarification.

Bibliographical Note

Several works of reference will be referred to by the author's name only (e.g. Fraser, Vol. 1 etc.), other works by key words related to the title (e.g. Bell, *Jews and Christians*). Articles will be mostly referred to by the common abbreviated titles of periodicals, yearbooks, Jubilee Volumes etc.

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Tel-Aviv.

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Abbreviations

1. *Inscriptions, Papyri, Ostraca*

- BGU* = *Ägyptische Urkunden aus den königlichen Museen zu Berlin – Griechische Urkunden*, I-VIII (1895-1933).
- CIG* = A. Boeckh et al. (eds.), *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum*, Berlin 1828-1877.
- CIJ* = J.B. Frey (ed.), *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum*, I-II (1936, 1952).
- CPJ* = V.A. Tcherikover, A. Fuks, M. Stern (eds.), *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*, I-III (1957-1964).
- FGrH* = F. Jacoby (ed.), *Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, Berlin-Leiden 1923-.
- IG* = *Inscriptiones Graecae*, Ausgabe der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, 1873-.
- IGLS* = L. Jalabert, R. Mouterde, C. Mondesert, J.P. Ray-Coquais (eds.), *Inscriptions Grecques et Latines de la Syrie*, 1929-.
- IGRR* = R. Cagnat (ed.), *Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas Pertinentes*, 1911-1927.
- MAMA* = W. Calder et al. (eds.), *Monumenta Asia Minoris Antiqua*, 1928-1962.
- M. Chr.* = L. Mitteis, U. Wilcken., *Grundzüge und Chrestomatie der Papyrskunde*, II: 2, Berlin-Leipzig 1912.
- O. Bodl.* = J.G. Tait (ed.), *Greek Ostraca in the Bodlian Library at Oxford and Various other Collections*, 1930.
- OE* = *Fouilles franco-polonaises*, Rapport I, Tell Edfou, 1937 (pp. 141f.); 1938 (pp. 137f.).
- OGIS* = W. Dittenberger (ed.), *Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae*, Lipsia 1903-1905.
- O. Mich.* = L. Amundsen (ed.), *Greek ostraca in the University of Michigan Collection*, Ann Arbor 1935.
- O. Strassb.* = P. Viereck (ed.), *Griechische und griechisch-demotische Ostraka der Universität- und Landesbibliothek zu Strassburg in Elsass*, Berlin 1923.
- O. Theb.* = J.G. Milne (ed.), *Theban Ostraca*, London-Oxford 1913.
- PCZ* = C.C. Edgar (ed.), *Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire; Zenon Papyri*, Cairo 1925-1931.
- P. Col. Zen.* = W.L. Westermann et al. (eds.), *Zenon Papyri, Business Papers of the Third Century B.C. dealing with Palestine and Egypt*, I-II, New York 1934, 1940.
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- P. Ent.* = O. Guéraud (ed.), *ENTEYΞEΙΣ: Requêtes et plaintes adressées au roi d'Égypte au III^e siècle avant J.-C.*, Cairo 1950.
- P. Fay.* = B.P. Grenfell, A.S. Hunt, D.G. Hogarth (eds.) *Fayûm Towns and their Papyri*, London 1900.
- P. Flor.* = D. Comparetti, G. Vitelli (eds.), *Papiri greco-egizii*, Milan 1906-1915 (1962).
- P. Freib.* = W. Aly, M. Gelzer, J. Partsch, U. Wilcken (eds.), *Mitteilungen aus der Freiburger Papyrussammlung*, Heidelberg 1927.
- P. Giss.* = O. Eger, E. Kornemann, P.M. Meyer (eds.) *Griechische Papyri im Museum des oberhessischen Geschichtsvereins zu Giessen*, Leipzig-Berlin 1910-1912.
- P. Gurob* = J.G. Smyly (ed.), *Greek Papyri from Gurob*, Dublin 1921.
- P. Hal.* = *Dikaimata: Auszüge aus Alexandrinischen Gesetzen und Verordnungen in einem*

- Papyrus des philologischen Seminars der Universität Halle mit einem Anhang weiterer Papyri derselben Sammlung*, herausgegeben von der Graeca Haelnsis, Berlin 1913.
- P. Hamb.* = P.M. Meyer (ed.), *Griechische Papyrusurkunden der Hamburger Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek*, Leipzig-Berlin 1911-1924.
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- P. Lille* = P. Jouguet (ed.), *Papyrus grecs* (Institut Papyrologique de l'Université de Lille), 1907-1928.
- P. Lips.* = L. Mitteis (ed.), *Griechische Urkunden der Papyrussammlung zu Leipzig*, 1906.
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- P. Magd.* = *P. Lille*, Vol. ii (Papyri from Magdola) 1912.
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- P. Ryl.* = A.S. Hunt, J. de M. Johnson, V. Martin, C.H. Roberts, E.G. Turner (eds.), *Catalogue of the Greek and Latin Papyri in the John Rylands Library*, Manchester 1911-.
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- SB* = F. Preisigke, F. Bilabel, E. Kiessling (eds.), *Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunden aus Ägypten*, Göttingen 1915-.
- SEG* = *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*, Leiden 1923-.
- SP* = A.S. Hunt, C.C. Edgar (eds.), *Select Papyri* (Loeb Classical Library), London 1932-1934.
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- WO* = U. Wilcken (ed.), *Griechische Ostraka aus Ägypten und Nubien*, I-II, Leipzig-Berlin 1899.

2. Periodicals and Series

- Aegyptus* = *Aegyptus: Rivista italiana di egittologia e di papirologia*
- AIP* = *Annuaire de l'institut de philologie et d'histoire Orientales et Slaves*
- AJA* = *American Journal of Archaeology*
- AJAH* = *American Journal of Ancient History*
- AJPh* = *American Journal of Philology*

AJTh = *American Journal of Theology*
ASAE = *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte*
Archiv = *Archiv für Papyrusforschung*
BA = *The Biblical Archaeologist*
BASOR = *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BCH = *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*
BIFAO = *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'Archéologie orientale*
BSAA = *Bulletin de la Société archéologique d'Alexandrie*
BSAC = *Bulletin de la société d'archéologie copte*
CAH = *Cambridge Ancient History*
Chr. d'Ég. = *Chronique d'Égypte*
Class. Philol = *Classical Philology*
DLKIW = *Deutsche Literaturzeitung für Kritik der internationalen Wissenschaft*
HTR = *Harvard Theological Review*
HUCA = *Hebrew Union College Annual*
IEJ = *Israel Exploration Journal*
JBL = *Journal of Biblical Literature*
JEA = *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*
JHS = *Journal of Hellenic Studies*
JJP = *Journal of Juristic Papyrology*
JJS = *Journal of Jewish Studies*
JNES = *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JPOS = *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society*
JQR = *Jewish Quarterly Review*
JRS = *Journal of Roman Studies*
JSS = *Jewish Social Studies*
JTS = *Journal of Theological Studies*
MGWJ = *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*
NTS = *New Testament Studies*
OTS = *Old Testament Studies*
PAAJR = *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*
PEF = *Palestine Exploration Fund*
PEQ = *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
QAL = *Quaderni del archeologia della Libia*
RB = *Revue Biblique*
REA = *Revue des études anciennes*
REG = *Revue des études grecques*
REJ = *Revue des études juives*
REV. Arch. = *Revue archéologique*
Rev. d. Philol. = *Revue de Philologie*
RHR = *Revue de l'histoire de religions*
Riv. d. Fil. = *Rivista di filologia classica*
TAPA = *Transactions of the American Philological Association*
VDI = *Vestnik Drevnej Istorii*
YCS = *Yale Classical Studies*
Yediot = *Bulletin of the Israel Exploration Society* (Hebrew)
ZNW = *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*

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Introduction

Milestones in the political history of the Jews in Egypt

Jews began settling in Egypt long before its conquest by Alexander the Great. The first foundations of that settlement were laid already at the time of the XXVI Saite Dynasty which dislodged the Assyrian yoke and at the end of the seventh century B.C.E. sought to reinstate Egyptian hegemony in Palestine and Syria. During the Babylonian period Egyptian involvement in Palestine increased, and concomitantly the land of the Nile became a target for Jewish immigration whether for political or purely economic reasons. The chief waves of immigration were undoubtedly connected with the national tragedy represented by the destruction of the First Temple. Despite the tragedy, however, all the exiles to Egypt of that time were not inevitably helpless war refugees, for many of them were absorbed into the Egyptian military forces. One of the outstanding examples was the immigration of Johanan son of Kareah and "the captains of the forces", who proceeded to Egypt after the murder of Gedaliah son of Ahikam, and were settled in Migdol and Tahpanhes (in Lower Egypt), in Noph (Memphis in Middle Egypt) and in "the land of Pathros" (i.e., the southern country or Upper Egypt)¹. During the reign of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, for instance, Jewish soldiers served in the army of Psammetichus II (594-589 B.C.E.), as reported in the *Letter of Aristeas* (§ 13) and indirectly confirmed in Herodotus (II 161) and in epigraphy². The Aramaic papyri from Elephantine too confirm that the beginnings of extensive Jewish settlement on Egyptian soil occurred during the Saitic dynasty, although the exact circumstances of the establishment of the military colony at Elephantine are unclear. That well-known colony, whose residents were offi-

1 *Jer.*, 44:1; and see *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, vol 4, p. 635f.; vol. 5, pp. 212-216; vol. 6, p. 642.

2 For details see Porten, *Archives from Elephantine*, p. 8f.

cially known as (*Ḥaylā Yehudeia*) (= Jewish garrison) and defended Egypt's southern border, reached its apogee under the Persians from 525 B.C.E. until about 399 B.C.E.³

The *Letter of Aristeas* implies a further wave of Jewish immigration that started after the Persian conquest (*loc. cit.*) in the wake of which evidently quite a number of Jews joined the local garrisons (like that of Elephantine). Later, at the end of the Persian period, many Jerusalemites were forcibly transported to Egypt (*ibid.*, 35) but the scantiness and vagueness of the information available does not allow for any accurate historical conclusions⁴.

The information we have on the immigration of Jews from Palestine to Egypt in the Hellenistic period attributes the initial impetus to Alexander the Great⁵. Most scholars tend to ascribe apologetic tendencies to the reports in their view the reports were aimed at ascribing the privileges accorded the Jews of Alexandria to Alexander the Great himself. Although such a claim is not totally refutable, the reports do appear to be quite credible⁶.

Better founded information on the immigration of Jews from Palestine to Egypt relates to the period of the Diadochs, Alexander's successors, between 323 and 301 B.C.E.⁷ As Josephus, who preserved that information, clearly noted its sources, it has generally been regarded as reliable. One of Josephus' statements (*C. Apionem*, I 186-189) based on Hecataeus of Abdera (a contemporary of Alexander the Great and Ptolemy I) tells of the willing immigration of a considerable group of Jews led by the priest Hezekias, who moved to Egypt following the battle of Gaza (312 B.C.E.) in which

3 *Ibid.*, p. 19f.

4 I believe this hint in the *Letter of Aristeas* refers to the secret events which occurred in the reign of Artaxerxes III Ochus (359/8-338/7 B.C.E.) which fit in with the troubles hinted at in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers (see Schürer, vol. 3, pp. 7-8 and n. 11) and *C. Apionem*, II 191, 194. See also Klausner, *History of the Second Temple* vol. 2, p. 13f.; Grinz, *The Book of Judith*, p. 18f.; Barag, *BASOR*, 133 (1966), pp. 6-12; E. Stern, *The Material Culture of the Land of the Bible in the Persian Period*, p. 250ff.

5 See *Bellum*, II 487; *C. Apionem*, II 35, 42.

6 For extensive treatment see Kasher, *Beth Mikra*, 20 (1975), pp. 187-208; see also chap. IV, C. On the credibility of Josephus in this case, see lately: D. Golan, "Josephus, Alexander's visit to Jerusalem, and modern historiography", in: *Josephus Flavius, Historian of Eretz-Israel in the Hellenistic-Roman Period* (ed. U. Rappaport), Jerusalem 1982, pp. 29-55 (Hebrew).

7 For the general background of these wars, see Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, pp. 50-59; Will, *Histoire politique*, vol. 1, pp. 39-70.

Ptolemy I and Demetrius Poliorcetes confronted each other⁸. In that connection Josephus based himself on another excerpt from Hecataeus, and noted that the war of the Diadochs actually led to Jewish immigration in various directions — to the Phoenician cities in the north and Egypt in the south (*ibid.*, 194). The two testimonies perhaps indicate a rift in the Jewish community between adherents of Antigonus Monophthalmus and his son Demetrius Poliorcetes on the one hand, and on the other the adherents of Ptolemy, so that the opposite directions of immigration suggest a polarity in political positions. When the Ptolemaic kingdom was officially established in 306 B.C.E., extensive opportunities to settle in Egypt became available to Jews, for the rulers encouraged immigration from foreign countries for the purpose of defending their throne against the native population, and they set up numerous military colonies throughout the kingdom⁹. Most of the Palestinian Jews were evidently more inclined toward Antigonus Monophthalmus, who besides being a more gifted commander, manifested a more liberal attitude to his subjects. If not for that preference, Ptolemy I would not have had to conquer Jerusalem by a trick on the Sabbath. Testimony on that episode is provided by Josephus (*ibid.*, 205-211; *Antiquitates*, XII 5-6) citing the Greek writer Agatharchides of Cnidus of the second century B.C.E., apparently relating to 302 B.C.E.¹⁰ The *Letter of Aristaeas* (§§12-14) adds a few details, noting that Ptolemy I transported 100,000 Jewish captives to his country, drafted the 30,000 men into his army, and assigned them to garrison duty in fortresses, selling the rest (women, children and the elderly) into slavery. According to this source (§§14-27, 37) they were latter redeemed by Ptolemy II Philadelphus. Today there is no doubt of the historic truth of those reports, although the number of captives must be taken with a grain of salt and viewed as simple literary exaggeration¹¹. Presumably the immigration of Jews from Palestine to Egypt in Ptolemy I's time, whether forced or free, was not a single instance but a continuous

8 See a full analysis of this report on p. 41 below.

9 See full coverage in the studies of Lesquier, Launey, Bouché-Leclercq and Bevan.

10 See Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, pp. 55-58; M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors*, I, pp. 104-109. On the problem of war on the Sabbath mentioned in the same report, see Bar Kochva, *The Wars of the Hasmonaeans*, p. 331f.

11 See Wilcken, *Archiv*, 12 (1936), p. 221f.; Wilhelm, *Archiv*, 14 (1941), p. 30f.; Hadas, *Aristaeas to Philocrates*, pp. 28-32, 104; Westerman, *AJPh*, 59 (1938), pp. 1ff., esp. 19-38; M. Gutmann, *Dinaburg Anniversary Book*, pp. 76-79.

process associated with his wars in Coele-Syria and lasting about a generation (320-301 B.C.E.). It should be noted in this connection that tombstones found in the vicinity of Alexandria and dated to the start of the Hellenistic period confirm the settlement of Jews in Egypt at that time (*CIJ*, II 1424-1431).

Under Ptolemy II Philadelphus (284-246 B.C.E.) the development of Jewish community life, particularly in Alexandria, was greatly advanced. Epigraphic and papyrological findings indicate that from that time on there was a steady increase in the number of Jews absorbed in the army, in administrative services, and in sentry and police duty (specified below). Like other ethnic groups, the Jews of Egypt too enjoyed, as much as circumstances permitted, the great privilege of maintaining community life within the framework of military and administrative service. In Ptolemaic terms, a community of that kind was called a *politeuma*, that is, a national (or religious) group enjoying certain political privileges, first and foremost the maintenance of an independent judicial system and community establishment, on the basis of the right to preserve ancestral customs¹². We shall see below that the Jewish community in Alexandria was organized according to that pattern, and content ourselves here just with mentioning the well-known document from the *Letter of Aristeas* (§§ 308-310).

In the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, Alexandria was already one of the most important centers of Hellenistic culture, and the royal court was the seat of philosophers and scholars, writers and poets. They all took an active part in the political life of Egypt and contributed a great deal to the formation of its laws and political regime in the spirit of their philosophical aspirations and thought¹³. The close acquaintance they had with the Jewish religion and Jewish people evoked considerable admiration and deep intellectual interest on their part. According to the *Letter of Aristeas*, the initiative to translate the Pentateuch into Greek came from the court. The idea was proposed by the director of the royal library, Demetrius of Phaleron, who quickly gained the vigorous support of the king himself. In his enthusiasm, Ptolemy II Philadelphus despatched an official delegation to the High Priest Eleazar in Jerusalem, to ask for help in the

¹² For details see below p. 30 and n.5.

¹³ Fraser, vol. 1, p. 305f.

planned translation. The latter responded by sending to Egypt seventy-two sages who knew both the Torah and the Greek language. It took seventy-two days to complete the translation (generally known as the Septuagint, that is, "the translation of the seventy") whereupon it was read aloud to the amazement of the audience, in the presence of the Jewish *politeuma* with its elders and leaders. After the reading, the translation was officially approved at the ceremony, and it was decided to consecrate the text in perpetuity (*Letter of Aristeas*, 308-311). In the end the translation was read to the king himself, who expressed his appreciation for the pearls of wisdom in it, and recognized its sanctity.

Despite the tinge of legend coloring the story, it is hard to doubt the fact that intellectual circles at the Ptolemaic court found the values of Judaism of great interest, which led to the production of the Septuagint¹⁴. Yet some scholars believe that a translation was needed by the Jews, whose involvement in Hellenistic culture had led to their abandonment of the Hebrew language¹⁵ (a view apparently based on a retroprojection from Moses Mendelssohn's translation of the Pentateuch into German to fill the needs of the "enlightened" Jews of Germany). At any rate, there is nothing in the sources to support or confirm such a hypothesis. Nor does it seem likely that the Jews became so quickly and deeply rooted in Greek culture so that within a single generation the Alexandria community already needed the Torah in Greek to meet its religious needs. Furthermore, it is hard to imagine that captivity and slavery, which were the lot of many Jews till Ptolemy II Philadelphus freed them, could create the proper conditions for cultural assimilation. The close ties with Judaea during the century of Ptolemaic rule there (301-200 B.C.E.), the geographic proximity and the immigration that proceeded throughout the Syrian Wars would all likewise counter the above view¹⁶. It is more reasonable to suppose that the Ptolemies' loss of Palestine and the severance of the ties between Egyptian Jews and their brothers in Jerusalem produced new historical conditions that made the Jews of Egypt more open to the external influence of Hellenistic culture,

14 See J. Gutman, *The Beginnings of Jewish Hellenistic Literature*, vol. 1, pp. 115f.; 189-192.

15 The first to express this view was Zechariah Frankel, *Vorstudien zu der Septuaginta*, p. 5f.; see also Tcherikover, *op.cit.*, pp. 348ff.; Fraser, vol. 1, p. 687f. For a different opinion see Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, p. 101f., 162f.

16 Cf. J. Gutman, *op.cit.*, p. 119f.

while there was no convenient, regular possibility of “recharging the batteries” of Jewish values. Consequently it is more likely that the initiative for translating the Pentateuch into Greek did indeed come from the intellectual circles of the Ptolemaic court, and did not derive from internal Jewish needs. It should be noted that talmudic sources too suggest Greek initiative for the translation¹⁷. It is hard to determine exactly when the text of the translation was sanctified by the Jewish community of Alexandria, but this does not appear to have been done before the middle of the second century B.C.E. One way or the other, the translation was one of the most important spiritual creations for Hellenistic Jewry, particularly since it provided inspiration for a whole series of Greek-speaking Jewish writers and philosophers in succeeding generations.

The Ptolemaic court’s enlightened interest in Jews and Judaism, as well as the monumental Pentateuch translation projects, fostered the growth of anti-Jewish works already in the time of Ptolemy II Philadelphus. It developed in Hellenized circles of the Egyptian priestly aristocracy, whose first spokesman was Manetho. Just as the Septuagint provided inspiration to Jewish philosophers in subsequent generations, so the anti-Jewish libels of Manetho supplied a literary base for many-storied structures of anti-Jewish literature¹⁸.

Little literary information has survived on the Jews of Egypt in the reign of Ptolemy III Euergetes I (246-221 B.C.E.), except for a rather muffled echo in the story of the Tobaid Joseph reported by Josephus¹⁹. It is told that Joseph son of Tobias wished to marry his daughter to one of the prominent members of the Alexandria Jewish community (*Antiquitates*, XII 187), indicating the prosperity of that community already then, and perhaps also its independent organization headed by an aristocratic leadership. Joseph’s endeavor to hide his sin of fornication, which he himself said was contrary to the prohibition against a Jew approaching a Gentile woman, is readily explainable in the literary context against the background of strict

17 *T.J. Megillah*, I 10 (71d); *Mekhilta for Ex. 12:40*; *Maseketh Soferim*, 1:7; *Aboth de-Rabbi Nathan*, version B, 37:1; cf. above n.14.

18 Kasher, *Studies in the History of the Jewish People and the Land of Israel*, vol. 3 (1975), pp. 69-84.

19 See M. Stern, *Tarbiz*, 32 (1963), pp. 35-47, for an exhaustive historical analysis of this story.

compliance with precepts on the part of the Alexandria Jews at the time.

The reign of Ptolemy IV Philopator (221-205 B.C.E.) was marked by religious fanaticism and the persecution of Egyptian Jews in general and Alexandrian Jews in particular. A detailed literary survey of that period is preserved in *III Maccabees*, which has been a matter of dispute in modern scholarly literature. Although several scholars have treated the story as entirely fictional, and sought to find its historical core in later periods, they do not seem to have been able to shake its foundations²⁰.

There is no surviving literary information on Egyptian Jewry under Ptolemy V Epiphanes (205-180 B.C.E.) either. However, one of the fateful events of the life of that community occurred in his reign — the detachment from Palestine following the Seleucid victory in the Fifth Syrian War (202-200 B.C.E.) The effects of that event on the life of the Jews of Egypt were discernible during the reign of Ptolemy VI Philometor (180-145 B.C.E.) and thereafter. The deterioration of relations between the Jewish community of Palestine and the Seleucid authorities from the time of Seleucus IV (187-175 B.C.E.) on turned the Jews into an important factor in Ptolemaic policy, since they could contribute a great deal to the ejection of the Seleucid from the region. The development of a pro-Ptolemaic orientation in Jerusalem, as can be seen from the Onias III episode²¹, is thus not surprising. His removal as High Priest in 175 B.C.E. by pro-Seleucid Hellenizers, and his foul murder shortly thereafter, did not lessen opposition to the Antioch authorities, quite the contrary. When Onias IV, the legitimate successor to the High Priesthood, realized that the authorities had turned the high office into a toy for sale to the highest bidder, and had abolished his family's claim to it by appointing Menelaus and after him Alcimus, he lost all hope and left for Egypt.

In Egypt Onias IV found a loyal ally in Ptolemy VI Philometor, and through him was able to entertain hopes of one day returning to Jerusalem. For the Ptolemies had not reconciled themselves to the loss of Palestine. In 172 B.C.E. they undertook a new initiative that

²⁰ See chapter VI, section b, below for details.

²¹ M. Stern, *Zion*, 25 (1960), p. 5f.

involved them heavily in the Sixth Syrian War (170-168 B.C.E.)²². It is reasonable to suppose that under such circumstances, Ptolemy VI considered Onias IV an ally, and perhaps even more than that, a political instrument likely to be extremely helpful in reinstating Egypt's political influence in Palestine. It is against this background that one should judge Josephus' testimony on the establishment of the military colony of Land of Onias, that stretched along the eastern tributaries of the Delta, and at whose center, in the town of Leontopolis, was erected the sanctuary known as the Temple of Onias²³.

The strategic importance of the Land of Onias for the defense of Egypt was very great, for Egypt could not be conquered except by invasion from that direction. From the geo-strategic point of view, Egypt was like an island surrounded by impassible natural obstacles. To the north was the Mediterranean, to the south the mountains of Ethiopia, to the west the Libyan desert and the Sahara, to the east the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. The conquest of Egypt, including Alexandria, was thus contingent upon the seizure of the region along the eastern arm of the Delta to its head. To cross the Delta breadth-wise (directly to Alexandria) was completely senseless because of the intervening aquatic obstacles and areas that could be flooded and blocked. The fact that the Jews were assigned to the defense of that sensitive area for about a hundred years certainly indicates the authorities' view of both their political reliability and their military qualifications²⁴.

However aggrandized Josephus' report of the appointment of Onias IV and his friend Dositheus as commanders of the Ptolemaic army (*C. Apionem*, II 49) is considered, their military importance and high rank cannot be ignored, and Josephus may not have exaggerated at all in regard to the role they played in the history of Egypt in the short reign of Cleopatra II in 145 B.C.E. It is reasonable to suppose that their unreserved loyalty to her and their readiness to defend her throne against her foes — Ptolemy VIII (Euergetes II) and the Alexandrian *polis* — placed them in the higher echelons of the military command, and increased their political importance to the highest degree (*ibid.*, 50f.). It is inconceivable that Onias IV could

22 Will, *Histoire politique*, p. 257f.

23 See pp. 119ff. below.

24 See Stern, *Greek and Roman Authors*, vol. I, p. 404f.

have defended Cleopatra's throne with only a small military force²⁵, if he did not have the help of the Alexandria Jews. The location of the Jewish quarter known as "Delta" in the rear of the royal palace in Cape Lochias²⁶ may support the conclusion that Onias was helped by Jews within the city, and that was probably the reason they were persecuted by Ptolemy VIII Physcon (Euergetes II) in 145 B.C.E.²⁷ Although Josephus' description of this episode, including the miracle that happened to the Jews (*C. Apionem*, II 53-55) is a weak diluted paraphrase of what *III Maccabees* relates about the religious persecutions by Ptolemy IV Philopator, that description has been accorded more credibility as a historical source. In fact, however, the two episodes should be distinguished, and should not necessarily be considered as referring to a single event²⁸.

It is reasonable to suppose that the marriage of Ptolemy VIII (Euergetes II) to Cleopatra II solved the problem of Jewish political loyalty, at least for a while. But the rift in the royal family did not heal, and in 131 B.C.E. a new conflict emerged which escalated into a protracted civil war (to 124 B.C.E.) and ended with another reconciliation²⁹. Presumably the Jews remained loyal to Cleopatra, and consequently it is not at all clear whether the miracle reported by Josephus took place in 145 B.C.E. as Tcherikover proposed³⁰, or in 124 B.C.E. In any case the fact that Ptolemy VIII came to terms with the Jews and resumed normal relations with them is shown by inscriptions dedicated to him in various synagogues³¹.

Onias IV's move to Egypt was part of a great wave of immigration in the wake of the stormy events in Palestine after the persecutions of Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the revolt of the Hasmonaeans, and

25 The source states the Onias went up to Alexandria at the head of a small army (*στρατὸν ὀλίγον*). Some scholars have corrected the text and added *οὐκ* (= not) before the word *ὀλίγον*, which complicates matters unacceptably; cf. J. Cohen, *Judaica et Aegyptiaca*, p. 33.

26 *Bellum*, II 495; *C. Apionem*, II 33-37; and see Fraser, vol. 1, p. 35; vol. 2, p. 109 and n.270.

27 For detailed surveys of the general background, see Bevan, p. 306f.; Otto & Bengtson, *Zur Geschichte des Niederganges des Ptolemäerreiches*, p. 23f.

28 See pp. 211ff. below (ch. 6, B.).

29 Fraser, vol. 1, p. 121f.

30 Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, p.283; Bickermann, *PAAJR*, 20 (1957), p. 130f.

31 *CIJ*, II 1441-2, 1449.

its effect extended as far as Cyrene. A considerable portion of the immigrants were no doubt ordinary war refugees, seeking to better their situation in the traditional land of opportunity, Egypt. Others were certainly political exiles who wanted a haven until anger dissipated. Among the latter were also Hellenizers looking for refuge abroad from the ire of the Hasmonaean rebels (*I Maccabees*, XV 15-24).

When the Hasmonaean rebels defeated the Seleucids, the bonds between the Jews of Egypt and their brothers in Zion became closer. Jewish volunteers from Egypt and Cyrene may even have taken an active part in the Hasmonaean revolt³². At any rate, the religious and national identification of the Jews of Egypt with the goals of the Hasmonaean rebels was expressed in the Hanukkah Letter (*II Maccabees*, I 1f.)³³. The spiritual and religious affinity with Jerusalem was interestingly revealed by Josephus in reporting on penetrating discussions the Alexandrian Jews held with the Samaritans regarding the holiness of the temples in Jerusalem and Mount Gerizim (*Antiquitates*, XIII 74-79), reportedly in the presence of Ptolemy VI Philometor. The discussion may well have exceeded the limits of a verbal religious disagreement, and become a serious violent conflict that required high level mediation. Although absolute truth cannot be inferred from the sources, the testimony does show how close the Jerusalem temple was to the hearts of the Jews of Alexandria, and how zealous they were in defending its sanctity. The spiritual ties between the Alexandria Jews and Jerusalem are indicated also in the translation into Greek of the book of Ben-Sira (Sirach) after 118 B.C.E., by the author's grandson, who even proceeded to Egypt (132 B.C.E.) for this purpose³⁴. One of the foremost representatives of the Jewish intelligentsia in Alexandria in those days was the philosopher Aristobulus, a member of the high priestly family who served in the court of Ptolemy VI Philometor as "the teacher of King Ptolemy" (*II Maccabees*, I 10) and who was the recipient of the famous Hanukkah Letter. His "Exegesis to the Law of Moses" of which vestiges have survived in the works of the Church Fathers, was dedicated to

32 Appelbaum, *Jews and Greeks in Ancient Cyrene*, pp.139-140; Bar Kochva, *Beth. Mikra*, 45 (1974), p. 432f.

33 See Bickermann, *ZNW*, 32 (1933), p. 233f.

34 Segal, *The Complete Book of Ben-Sira*, Foreword, p. i; see also Tcherikover, *op.cit.*, p. 142ff.; Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, vol. 1, p. 131f.

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