



Joseph and Aseneth: Loyalty, Traitors, Antiquity and Diasporan Identity

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Abstract

The final part of *Joseph and Aseneth* (chs. 23–29) tells a story that seems unconnected to the main part of the book. It recounts an attempt by Pharaoh's son to kill Joseph and Aseneth, his death and Joseph's 48-year rule over Egypt. Scholarly research barely relates to this story, probably since it inhabits the margins of the love story of Joseph and Aseneth. Neither does this story contribute any valuable commentary on the biblical Genesis narrative. It is suggested that this part of the book underscores the unbroken Jewish loyalty to the Ptolemaic-Egyptian regime in the unique circumstances of deep-rooted Jewish participation in that regime alongside adversarial elites, as well as the need to exhibit and emphasize Jewish loyalty while also depicting an internecine struggle within the royal family. The probable date of the book is therefore the last decade of the second century or the first two decades of the first century BCE.

Keywords: *Joseph and Aseneth*, loyalty, Oniads, Diaspora, Ptolemy Lathyrus, Ptolemy Alexander, reconciliation.

The Jewish Hellenistic composition *Joseph and Aseneth* is composed, in effect, of two distinct and separate sections. The first and longer section deals with Aseneth's conversion and her marriage to Joseph,

while the second, chs. 23–29, recounts Pharaoh’s son’s attempt to kill Joseph, abduct Aseneth and wed her and also to murder Pharaoh, his father.¹ This section relates that Pharaoh’s son was envious of Joseph and would not be reconciled with Aseneth’s marriage to him. He sought the assistance of Simeon and Levi, Joseph’s brothers, in his murder and Aseneth’s abduction. They, however, refused to collaborate with Pharaoh’s son, warning him against any further attempts to harm Joseph. Rebuffed by Simeon and Levi, Pharaoh’s son appealed to the sons of the maidservants, Gad and Dan, falsely accusing Joseph of plotting to kill them in revenge for his sale to the Ishmaelites. Shocked, Gad and Dan agreed to cooperate with Pharaoh’s son’s effort to harm Joseph while he, on his part, undertook himself to strike at Pharaoh, his father, Joseph’s supporter. However, Pharaoh’s son’s patricidal attempt failed, as did the maidservants’ sons’ attack on Aseneth and her entourage, during which they were set upon by Joseph’s remaining brothers. Benjamin, who outdid himself defending Aseneth, his brother’s wife, mortally wounded Pharaoh’s son. Though Levi tended to Pharaoh’s wounded son, dissuading Benjamin from killing him, he succumbed to his wounds three days later. After Pharaoh’s death, consequent to that of his son, Joseph ruled Egypt for 48 years until Pharaoh’s younger son was competent to assume power and even thereafter Joseph continued to advise him *in loco parentis*.

The perceptible contiguity between the two sections that jointly address the marital bond between Joseph and Aseneth is noticeable: the first focuses on the form that the realization of this love assumes and the second relates Pharaoh’s son’s actions towards annulling this union and the foiling of his plot. Nevertheless, the second section’s connection to the book seems problematic. John Barclay determines that ‘After this climax [of the marriage of Joseph and Aseneth—NH] it is a little surprising to find several more chapters loosely attached at the end’,² and Erich Gruen defines the first section as a ‘love story’ and the second part as an ‘adventure tale’, claiming that the two sections ‘bear relatively little relation to one another’.³ On the other

1. Many scholars regard ch. 22 as the beginning of the book’s second part. However, Pharaoh’s son appears only in ch. 23, while ch. 22 recounts the meeting between Jacob and his new daughter-in-law and Levi’s esteem of Aseneth. Therefore it is preferable to view this chapter as a conclusion of the first section (by Jacob’s approval of the marital bond) or as a connecting link between the book’s two sections.

2. Barclay 1996: 205.

3. Gruen 1998: 93-94.

hand, it is clear to me that this unit constitutes an inseparable part of the story, since Pharaoh's son appears twice in the first section of the book as a candidate to wed Aseneth (1.11-14; 4.15) while this character's momentous role in the second part of the story imbues his appearances in the book's first section with additional meaning. The gun introduced in the first act actually fires in the third.⁴

Though this work has been a frequent topic of scholarly discourse in recent decades, discussion has, for the most part, centered on the books' first section. Thus, for example, two monographs published about a decade and a half ago—'Joseph and Aseneth and the Jewish Temple in Heliopolis' by Gideon Bohak and 'From Death to Life' by Randall Chesnutt—focus on Aseneth's conversion and its historical significance.⁵ The second part of the composition has generally been peripheral to scholarly research.

The pertinent question is: What is the significance of the second section of *Joseph and Aseneth*? While the need to expand upon the terse biblical account of Joseph's marriage to Aseneth (Gen. 41.45, 50-52) is understandable, the point of the second section's story that does not elucidate the Bible is unclear. Even if we read the author's motivation as highlighting the stability of Joseph and Aseneth's marital bond despite attempts to undermine it, many details in the second section seem extraneous and insignificant. Why, for example, are the deaths of Pharaoh and his son as well as Joseph's 48-year rule over Egypt (29.8-11) recounted? And what is the point of relating Simeon and Levi's loyalty to Joseph and their refusal to accede to Pharaoh's son's proposal to hurt him (23)? And what does the author gain by attributing patricidal aspirations to Pharaoh's son (24.13)?

Seemingly, then, neither the stability of Joseph and Aseneth's relationship nor the credibility of her conversion are the main purpose of the book's second section, whose focal point must be sought elsewhere.⁶

4. Humphrey (2000: 106) argues that this part of the book is a second tale answering the question 'what about Pharaoh's son?', as with most good stories and romances. I do not believe, however, that we can read this book as a novel or a romance designed solely for enjoyment's sake.

5. Chesnutt 1995; Bohak 1996.

6. Wills (1995: 177-84) suggests, relying on source criticism, that *Joseph and Aseneth* is divided into two layers: an early national hero romance and a late allegorical layer, instead of two sections. However, this explains neither the purpose of the exhaustive details of the 'national hero romance' nor the combining of the two layers.

According to the prevalent hypothesis in current studies on *Joseph and Aseneth*, the work is of Jewish provenance, was directed at a Jewish audience, and was composed in Hellenistic or Roman Egypt.⁷ This premise is based, among other things, on components of diasporan Jewish identity pivotal to the book. First and foremost is the question of Gentile conversions and their status as proselytes—one that assumes special significance in a Gentile environment.⁸ According to Johnson, this issue of proselytism and the Jewish community is the main subject of the book. The first section focuses on the individual proselyte, Aseneth, while the focus in the second episode shifts to address the different Jewish communal reactions to proselytism.⁹ Furthermore, the status of the Jews in Gentile society is conspicuously treated throughout the composition. As demonstrated by Erich Gruen, the book addresses Jewish–Gentile relationships in the Diaspora, primarily depicting Joseph as a powerful figure active in the royal court and considered preeminent among the king’s courtiers.¹⁰

Another facet of this general framework is highlighted by Gideon Bohak. He understands the book’s objective as reinforcing the legitimacy of Onias’s temple as a Jewish temple. In the same vein, he views the second part of the work as an indication of the book’s Oniad origin on account of the admiration for Pharaoh that it evinces, clearly suggesting the Ptolemaic period rather than Roman times when Egypt was no longer a monarchy. Bohak regards Joseph’s wedding, sponsored by Pharaoh, and additional details as evidence of the favorable affiliation with Pharaoh.¹¹

Yet, to my mind, John J. Collins’ view in both editions of his *Between Athens and Jerusalem* regarding the objective of the story’s second section is the most productive. In his words:

The story of chs. 22–29 is evidently paradigmatic of Jewish–Gentile relations in the Egyptian Diaspora... The benevolence of the sovereign is assumed. The enemy of the Jews is the enemy of the pharaoh too... Yet

7. See, e.g., Chesnutt 1995: 258–60. Kraemer’s (1998) case for a late date and a possible Christian authorship has not been widely accepted; see, e.g., Collins 2000: 106; Johnson 2004: 108–109, and n. 50.

8. Chesnutt 1995: 262–64.

9. Johnson 2004: 117–20. However, her explanation ignores the centrality of Pharaoh’s son and Joseph’s ruling within this section and views it as ‘traditional framework’.

10. Gruen 1998: 95–99.

11. Bohak 1996: 42–47.

there are also powerful forces, high at court, which are hostile to the Jews and which are represented here by pharaoh's son. Those Jews who side with pharaoh's son against their own people stand self-convicted, but the pious do not seek vengeance against either them or the hostile Gentiles. Reconciliation is best. In all of this, the pious, represented by Levi and Simeon, retain a self-sufficiency based on their strength of arms and the help of God. Their conciliatory attitude comes from strength, not from weakness.¹²

These determinations appear to me correct. In this article I will substantiate and strengthen them and will propose the causes for Pharaoh's son's hostility to his father and to the Jews, according to *Joseph and Aseneth*, as well as the historical circumstances that conceivably produced this composition.

First, what is the motivation behind Pharaoh's son's desire to strike at Joseph according to *Joseph and Aseneth*? The obvious reason is Pharaoh's son's unrequited love for Aseneth, who preferred to marry Joseph (23.2). However, more than a love story, this is also a tale of politics, power and control. As Pharaoh's son attests, the beautiful Aseneth, daughter of Pharaoh's highest official and Priest of Heliopolis (1.4-5) was, from the onset, pledged to him, the son of Pharaoh (23.4) and Joseph's appropriation of her humiliated him. Yet Pharaoh's son statement is problematic: after all, his father refused his firstborn son's petition to marry Aseneth (1.11-14). On what, then, is the son's assertion based? Indeed, the first time Aseneth laid eyes on Joseph she refused to consider marriage to him on account of his lowly status and asked her father's permission to marry Pharaoh's son, as king of all the earth (4.11-15). Apparently, then, as Christoph Burchard notes, Pharaoh's son meant that Aseneth was in truth intended all along to be betrothed to him in accordance with his status as the king's son.¹³ Her marriage to Joseph can therefore be construed as undermining his status as the king's son, signifying, in effect, the transfer of power to Joseph. Pharaoh, who refused to wed Aseneth to his son, was the one to declare that she was the woman that God had destined for Joseph as the firstborn son of God (21.3).¹⁴ The fact that Pharaoh is a full partner to this union—he is the one to sponsor and authorize the

12. Collins 1983: 90-91; 2000: 109; see also 2005: 102.

13. Burchard 1985: 240: 'undoubtedly he means: "by Fortune, unknown to man"'.¹³

14. ὅτι αὐτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ πρωτότοκος (Philonenko 1968: 196, also accepted by Burchard 1985: 235; Reinmuth 2009: 106) in contrast with Pharaoh's son who is Pharaoh's firstborn (23.1: πρωτότοκος). Or, according to Battifol's edition (1889-90: 71), as the son of the most high (ὡς γὰρ υἱὸς ὑψίστου ἐστὶν Ἰωσήφ).

match (20.7; 21.4-8)—underscores Pharaoh's son's diminished status and Joseph's rise to favor in his stead. This being the case, according to the paradigm of Jewish–Gentile relations, this relationship articulates anxiety regarding highly placed Jews within the royal court. The reader is liable to perceive the status of the Jews as inferior and understand that in the event that they achieve a high position within the royal court they undermine the stability of the regime. Describing Joseph as commandeering the woman intended for the royal heir, compromising the position of the son of the royal family and enjoying more favor with the king than his legal heir, implies that the courtier Jews are indeed dangerous to the regime.

Yet Pharaoh's son's viewpoint is revealed as inherently flawed. This is preeminently demonstrated by Joseph's own behavior. He receives the royal crown from Pharaoh on his deathbed (29.10), rules over Egypt for 48 years and then hands over the reins of power to Pharaoh's young descendant who was an infant when Pharaoh died.¹⁵ Afterwards too, for the rest of Joseph's life he was as a father to Pharaoh's younger son (29.11). According to this description, Joseph does not harm the legitimate royal dynasty. He is a loyal guardian of the regime until the appropriate time arrives for Pharaoh's legal descendant to reign. And at that point in time he voluntarily relinquishes the crown, vacating the throne for the appropriate person. Then too, he continues to act on behalf of the royal house and assists Pharaoh's descendant when essential. In other words, the Egyptian regime only benefits from the involvement of Jews in the regime. Jews do not endanger the regime nor are they liable to damage it in any way; rather, they are profoundly loyal, to the extent that power can be entrusted to them when the dynasty becomes dysfunctional with the expectation that it be restituted at the appropriate time. Rather than undermining the regime, Jewish involvement at the highest court echelons achieves the opposite effect of regime stabilization and perpetuation.¹⁶

15. Reinmuth 2009: 128 and Burchard 1985: 247: 'and after this he gave the diadem to Pharaoh's younger offspring, who was at the breast when Pharaoh died. And Joseph was like a father to Pharaoh's younger son...' Philonenko (1968: 220) has 'Joseph gave the diadem to Pharaoh's ἐγγόνω', which means in general 'grandson'. This version does not reveal his age when Pharaoh died.

16. Bohak 1996: 45-46, emphasizes the positive character of Pharaoh emerging from these verses, and the high esteem accorded Pharaoh throughout the book. My

Additional facets of Joseph's conduct and Pharaoh's actions bolster this impression. When Pentephres, Aseneth's father, seeks to hold the nuptial feast, Joseph responds that first Pharaoh must be informed of the upcoming wedding, 'because he is like a father to me...and he himself will give her to me for (my) wife' (20.7). And, indeed, Pharaoh is the one who provides the necessities for the nuptial feast and even declares a seven-day holiday in honor of the wedding (21.7), as if Joseph were his own son. And, as aforementioned, Pharaoh transferred his crown to Joseph (29.10). Thus, the official royal position, emanating from the sovereign himself, confirms Joseph's special affinity to the monarchy as well as the special status bestowed upon him by the king. Confirmation of the senior Jewish courtiers' loyalty to the king is thus imprinted with the royal seal itself. Moreover, it is conceivable that Pharaoh's determination that Joseph is the firstborn son of God explains his standing at court as the individual who attracts the favor of God to the royal court.¹⁷

Apparently, though, it would be wrong to equate Joseph's position with that of Pharaoh's son, nor should Pharaoh's son be considered rejected by his father. After all, when Pharaoh's firstborn son died, his father fell sick with grief and died shortly thereafter (29.9-10). Thus one must conclude that the special treatment Pharaoh accorded Joseph did not obviate the unique status of Pharaoh's son as heir apparent.

Pharaoh's son's schemes and activities disclose his malevolent personality and highlight the contrasting qualities of Joseph and his brothers. First, Pharaoh's son seeks to kill his father (24.13; 25.1-3). Consequently, the only person in *Joseph and Aseneth* effectively conspiring against the king is none other than the king's lawful son himself. As Collins put it, 'the enemy of the Jews is the enemy of the Pharaoh too', and the reason for the hostility toward the king is Pharaoh's son's envy and hostility toward Joseph.¹⁸ In other words, it is not Joseph—representing the Jews—perceived by Pharaoh's son as

point highlights not Pharaoh's status but rather the Jews' standing as a loyal element in the realm.

17. On the God of the Jews as the founder, protector and stabilizer of the Gentile realm, see, e.g., *3 Macc.* 6.28; 7.2; *Letter of Aristeas* 15; LXX Est. E.16.

18. A close affinity between hostility towards the Jews and conspiring against the king's rule and life is evident in other diasporan Jewish-Hellenistic sources; see *3 Macc.* 6.24; LXX Est. A.17; E.12-14; see further Hacham 2012.

hazardous to the monarchy, who conspires against the king but rather his adversary, the king's son, who by all expectations should be the most devoted of all. Second, in order to perpetrate his plot, Pharaoh's son badmouths Joseph to his brothers, Dan and Gad, the sons of the maidservants, claiming that Joseph sought to kill them in revenge for his sale to the Ishmaelites (24.6-13).¹⁹ In other words, the negative accusations imputed to the courtier Jews are falsehoods. Moreover, the sons of Jacob, whose assistance Pharaoh's son is at this point soliciting, are those who sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites. They are, consequently, dubious, double-dealing types, who, lacking even fraternal loyalty, are hostile to Joseph and jealous of his success (24.2). Even when their brothers, Naphtali and Asher, the remaining maidservants' sons berate them and caution them against harming Joseph since God is with him, Dan and Gad protest and reject their admonishments (25.5-8). Obviously, the character of those who collude with Pharaoh's son reflects too on the object of their succor.²⁰

19. Pharaoh's son attributes to Joseph the statement that he is awaiting his father's death in order to perpetrate his plan (24.9-10). This is a reiteration of the statement by Esau, a negative character in Genesis, according to which 'Let but the mourning period for my father come and I will kill my brother Jacob' (Gen. 27.41). Possibly, the attribution of this statement to Joseph by Pharaoh's son underscores the latter's absurdity and iniquity since he himself is not awaiting his own father's natural demise but rather plotting his death.

20. The fact that there were Jews in Hellenistic Egypt who were disloyal to the faith of their forefathers and were thus considered by other Jews as disloyal to the regime as well is clearly evidenced by *3 Macc.* 7.10-15. It is therefore not inconceivable that Dan and Gad, the maidservants' sons, represent this group of Jews in the story before us. It is worth noting that Diasporan Jewish literature does not shrink from acknowledging Jewish sinners but rather portrays them as acting alone. See Schwartz 2008: 49-50 on this matter. However, in *Joseph and Aseneth*, Dan and Gad also represent, primarily perhaps, personal antagonism toward Joseph. Historical parallels for this paradigm are in short supply; no direct attestations of *political* rivalry within the Jewish community in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt are known to me up until Philo's time. On the other hand, a Jewish exegetical tradition ascribes fierce hatred of Joseph to Gad and Dan (*T. Dan* 1.4-8; *T. Gad* 1.8-2.2), while another tradition assigns responsibility for the sale of Joseph to the Ishmaelites to Gad (together with Simeon) (*T. Gad* 2.3-4, see further *T. Zeb.* 4.3). It is therefore possible that Dan and Gad's role in *Joseph and Aseneth* echoes a similar exegetical tradition rather than reflecting a concrete historical reality of intramural Jewish political conflicts. Seemingly there is no definitive solution to this question, which must remain, for now, unresolved.

The Jews' unqualified loyalty to the king is highlighted in other ways too. After Pharaoh's son is wounded in the course of his attempt to abduct Aseneth, Levi instructs Benjamin not to harm him further, but rather to treat his wounds and heal him, thus transforming him into a friend (φίλος) of the sons of Jacob.²¹ Furthermore, in ch. 23 when Pharaoh's son attempts to recruit Simeon and Levi as co-conspirators, the latter do not harm Pharaoh's son, though they could have easily done so; rather, they stress their fear of God and their fraternal fealty and caution Pharaoh's son to desist from his attempts to harm Joseph (23.8-14). Thus, even when the sons of Jacob, that is, the Jews, are threatened by a high-ranking government agent, and possess the wherewithal to counter him with aggression and effect his defeat, they choose not to do so but rather adopt a conciliatory stance and strive for peaceful co-existence. This is especially pronounced on the backdrop of two points: first, the characters chosen in this case to represent the sons of Jacob are Simeon and Levi, notorious for their slaughter of the citizens of Shechem as vengeance exacted for the rape of their sister, Dinah. This episode is mentioned twice in the narrative (23.3, 13), suggesting in the first verse not only Simeon and Levi's strength but also plausibly Pharaoh's son's logic regarding their zealous stance against intercourse with Gentiles, namely, the marriage of Joseph and Aseneth. The Jewish reader, however,²² highly cognizant of Simeon and Levi's act and perhaps even of Jacob's deathbed remarks concerning these deeds (Gen. 49.5-7), might well expect similar conduct from these characters towards other Gentiles, namely, Pharaoh's son. Simeon and Levi's divergent response is therefore somewhat surprising and accentuates the discrepancy between the real harm inflicted on Dinah that warranted a harsh reaction (23.13) and apprehension over a strike at Joseph, or a failed attempt to harm Aseneth, that do not justify the severe reaction that was appropriate in the case of Shechem. Moreover, even during the attempt to harm Aseneth, when she faced real danger, Levi did not

21. Pharaoh's son too desires Simeon and Levi as his companions (ἑταῖροι, 23.4) brothers and friends (ἀδελφοί...καὶ φίλοι, 23.5). However, this suggestion pertains only in the context of Pharaoh's son's attempt to harm Joseph, which inheres from his iniquitous conduct. Note that the bestowal of these official ranks is contingent on Simeon and Levi's cooperation with Pharaoh's son. On the other hand, there were no strings attached to Levi treatment of Pharaoh's son.

22. See above, n. 7.

allow anyone to kill Pharaoh's son. Thus, even those who might appear fanatic and hostile to Gentiles are not as they seem, implying that the Jews harbor no inherent hostility towards Gentiles. Second, another famous story recounting an attempt by senior officials in a Gentile kingdom to harm the Jews concluded with a Jewish defensive stand and a massive strike at their adversaries. This story is, of course, the one recounted in Esther. Though the Greek translation moderates the intensity of the struggle between the Jews and their Gentile neighbors,²³ the significant and intentional slaughter of the Jews' opponents that was its outcome is not absent from that version either. Contrastingly, the attempt by Pharaoh's son to strike at Joseph and Aseneth did not engender his deliberate assassination.

All these aforementioned details demonstrate that loyalty to the regime and reconciliation with forces hostile to the Jews are a central motif in *Joseph and Aseneth*.

This is a motif that stands out on the backdrop of the composition's separatist conception, according to which Joseph cannot be intimate with an idol worshiper nor can he dine with the likes of her, and on the background of the book's conception of the superiority of the Jewish religion as well as the beauty of the Jewish women and the bravery of Joseph's brothers.²⁴ Specifically on this backdrop, noting the fact of the Jew's loyalty to the regime assumes extra significance, as if to say that despite their obvious separatism and their rejection of idolatry and idolaters, this has no bearing on Jewish attitudes toward the regime.

Does the uncovering of these trends assist the dating of the composition?

Various dates have been suggested and, as Chesnutt demonstrated, it is difficult to draw precise conclusions. It is generally accepted that the composition was written between 100 BCE to 115 CE—most probably during the Ptolemaic period, before 30 BCE.²⁵ Yet attempts to narrow the focus are generally destined for failure. Even more objective criteria such as the book's language or its reliance on other

23. See, e.g., MT Est. 9.5 and the absence of a Greek translation of this verse. See further Hacham 2012: 341.

24. See Barclay 1996: 207-15, who stresses the immense gulf between Jews and Gentiles according to *Joseph and Aseneth*. His portrayal is, in my view, overstated.

25. Chesnutt 1995: 80-85. Oegema 2005: 103-104, prefers, however, the first half of the first century CE.

works fail to produce an irrefutable date. Efforts to pinpoint a concrete historical context reliant on hints in the book are all the more problematic since it is hard to point to a one-to-one parallel between the details of the story and recorded historical incidents. As Barclay remarked, such efforts have produced varying results:²⁶ while Collins cautiously tended toward the first century BCE,²⁷ Sanger proposed dating the work to the pogrom of 38 CE.²⁸ Humphrey pointed out an additional problem with the book's dating: as a literary work the book could reflect 'the idyllic period of the biblical story' rather than a concrete reality.²⁹

Despite the general shortcomings of this method of relying on analogous events, this is the path upon which I will now embark. It seems to me that the case before us is less vulnerable to general criticism of this method since before us is a rare literary point with few parallels in ancient Jewish literature as well as in Diasporan Jewish history during the Hellenistic-Roman period. This parallel appears therefore better established and can thus offer a reasonable dating for *Joseph and Aseneth*.

Indeed, the very existence of these conceptions among Diaspora Jewry in general and among the Jews of Hellenistic-Roman Egypt in particular represents no innovation. It is incumbent upon a conspicuous and separatist minority living under foreign rule to provide evidence of its loyalty to the regime and this minority often owes its rights, status and very presence in the state to the regime.³⁰ This phenomenon is documented throughout the thousands of years of Jewish history in the Diaspora and in the case of Hellenistic-Roman Egypt one can mention, for example the Greek translation of *Esther* and *3 Maccabees* as indicative of the need to underscore the

26. Barclay 1996: 447.

27. Collins 2000: 109; 2005: 107-108.

28. Sanger 1985.

29. Humphrey 2000: 28-31 (31).

30. For a similar consideration of the book's date, see Bohak 1996: 46-47. Bohak remarks that the features that he notes—the high estimation of Pharaoh and the reliance of Jewish circles on the king—are not unique to *Joseph and Aseneth* and therefore it is difficult to extract a date for the book based on them. However, as previously elaborated, the focal point of the discussion of Jewish loyalty to the regime touches on a unique point that stands to assist in pinpointing with greater precision the date of the book's composition and its social milieu.

Jews' unmitigated loyalty to the regime.³¹ Nearly two centuries later, Flavius Josephus' works demonstrate similar tendencies.³² However, the impression of deep-rooted Jewish participation in the receptive Egyptian regime alongside adversarial elites, the need to exhibit and emphasize Jewish loyalty as well as the depiction of an internecine struggle within the royal family, might allude to the conflict between Ptolemy VII and Cleopatra II on one side and Ptolemy VIII (145 BCE) on the other, a struggle in which Onias (and Dositheos) the Jew(s) supported the queen and the young heir to the throne (*Apion* 2.51-56), or to the years of conflict between Cleopatra III and her son Ptolemy Alexander against Ptolemy Lathyrus (107–88 BCE). In this struggle the Jews sided with the queen and her son against Ptolemy Lathyrus, a fact which apparently provoked anti-Jewish riots in Alexandria.³³ During these years Ananias and Chelkias, from the Land of Onias, served as Cleopatra's generals (Josephus, *Ant.* 13.285, 349). Since the mandatory *terminus post quem* for the book's authorship is the year 100, based on the book's reliance on the Septuagint (LXX),³⁴ it probably should be dated to the later clashes, to the period of the struggle between Ptolemy Alexander and Ptolemy Lathyrus. Collins also tends towards dating this composition to the first century BCE from similar considerations.³⁵

The proposal to identify the slant of the second part of *Joseph and Aseneth* and the date of the composition in the context of the leaders

31. *3 Macc.* 6.25-26; 7.7; LXX Est. E.15.

32. See, e.g., *Apion* 2.42-64; *Ant.* 11.317-45 (esp. 318); 12.8.

33. See the summary and sources in Hölbl 2001: 211, 220. The suggestion of Bar-Kochva 2010: 335-36 to date Lysimachus' hostile account on the Jews to the last decade of the second century BCE, which depends, among other considerations, on the internal struggle in the royal Ptolemaic family and the Jews' support to Cleopatra III and Ptolemy X Alexander, is consistent with our hypothesis.

34. Delling 1978; Chesnutt 1995: 80.

35. Collins 2000: 109-10; see also Capponi 2007: 73 n. 71. Collins (2005: 108) notes that the character of Levi in *Joseph and Aseneth* can be related to the last century of the Ptolemaic period since, 'this period provides a context where one might credibly imagine a Jewish priest-soldier intervening in conflicts within the royal family in Egypt'. Though this might be so, it should be noted that Levi, unlike the Oniad family, is not the principal Jewish leader in our composition, and that his involvement in the story is not characterized by support of one of the sides while confronting the other in contrast with what transpired between the Oniads and the Ptolemaic dynasty. It is therefore preferable to rely on other considerations when determining the composition's historical context.

of the Land of Onias brings to mind Gideon Bohak's proposal to elucidate the story of Aseneth's conversion as a religious validation of the establishment of the Jewish temple in Heliopolis, Onias's temple.³⁶ Reasonably, both hypotheses build off each other in mutual affirmation: the socio-political milieus associated with the temple and the Land of Onias were occupied with questions of self-identity in both the religious sphere regarding the temple constructed in the Heliopolis district on the ruins of a pagan temple and in regard to their self-perceived status in Egypt as members of the ruling class contending with the accusations and slurs cast their way. Both the composition's sections propose a paradigm of an ancient famous and high-ranking personality, a patriarch, who integrated within his actions elements of Jewish identity in Egypt. In this manner Joseph's marriage to Aseneth provides legitimacy to the establishment of the temple in the Heliopolitan nome, and Joseph's senior position in the royal court, merited by his absolute loyalty to Pharaoh, proves that in the past too, the integration of Jewish courtiers into the top tiers of the royal hierarchy incurred slander and libel disseminated by high-ranking Gentile court officials. Now, as then, their charges are unfounded.³⁷

A hypothesis proposed elsewhere should be added to these considerations: two other compositions that emphasize Jewish loyalty to the regime and the treachery of their Gentile court rivals—LXX Esther and *3 Maccabees*—were also probably composed during this period³⁸ and among similar social circles, demonstrating that this was a topic that preoccupied Egyptian Jewry. It can therefore be reasonably assumed that the Egyptian Hellenistic Jewish composition *Joseph and Aseneth*, at least its second part, which earnestly endeavors to demonstrate the Jews' absolute loyalty to the regime, was also composed within a similar historical framework—the last decade of the second century or the first two decades of the first century BCE.

36. Bohak 1996; see, e.g., his summary on pp. 101-104, especially 102.

37. Yet, regarding the date, there is no apparent need to adhere to Bohak's early dating (the mid-second century BCE), since it might be reasonably assumed that even a half century later, the question of the legitimacy of the temple in Heliopolis might have continued to preoccupy Jews, bestirring them to justify and define the temple's status as well as their own status in Egypt.

38. Hacham 2012.

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