

A SECOND TEMPLE IN EGYPT:  
THE EVIDENCE FOR THE ZADOKITE TEMPLE OF ONIAS

by

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Josephus provides two contradictory accounts of the establishment of a Jewish temple in Egypt by a Zadokite high priest named Onias, and the history of the founding of this temple is therefore reconstructed in different ways by nearly everyone who has written on it. In the hope of bringing this temple and its archaeology into prominence at a time when it seems a little neglected, I would like here to reconsider the evidence.<sup>1</sup> This is done with a view to understand better how the temple built by Onias may be used comparatively in studies of the origins of groups responsible for some of the documents among the Dead Sea Scrolls, and also in order to highlight yet another aspect of Second Temple Judaism which points to the diversity of Judaic religion and culture near the start of the first millennium.

In exploring this issue, I will try to determine rhetorical aspects of the accounts in Josephus. Since Josephus' notes on the temple built by Onias are negative to greater or lesser degrees, we need to consider how the negative presentation and purposes of the author (and his sources) function. Then, we will attempt to go beyond the texts as they stand in order to reconstruct a plausible historical scenario which may account for the way the material is presented.

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*The Jewish War*

Josephus frames his account of the Jewish revolt (fl. c. 75 CE) by the story of the establishment of an alternative temple in Egypt by the high priest Onias III. The first account in Josephus' work comes in *War* 1,31-33 where Josephus describes a serious factional dispute between different Jewish parties, one side favouring the Ptolemies of Egypt, the other the Seleucids of Syria. Onias the high priest is described as gaining the upper hand. He expells the Tobiads, who then flee to Syria and petition Antiochus Epiphanes to attack Jerusalem. Antiochus Epiphanes obliges, killing many pro-Ptolemy Jews and stealing their property. He plunders the temple and stops the sacrifices. "But the high priest Onias fled to Ptolemy and from him received a place in the Heliopolitan nome where he built a small town (πολίχνην) and a similar temple representing that of Jerusalem (τε τοῖς Ἱεροσολύμοις ἀπεικασμένην)" (*War* 1,33).

At the close of his narrative of the revolt, Josephus returns to the same subject in more detail. *War* 7,421-436 was written soon after the temple's closure in 73-4 CE. In this account, disturbances by refugee sicarii lead the emperor to worry about the strength of the Jewish community surrounding the temple built by Onias in Heliopolis nome, and he orders its destruction.<sup>2</sup>

The emperor, suspicious of the interminable tendency of the Jews to revolution, and fearing that they might again collect together in force and draw others away with them, ordered Lupus to demolish the Jewish temple in the so-called district of Onias. This is a region in Egypt which was colonized and given this name under the following circumstances. Onias, son of Simon, and one of the chief priests at Jerusalem, fleeing from Antiochus, king of Syria, then at war with the Jews, came to Alexandria, and being graciously received by Ptolemy, owing to that monarch's hatred of Antiochus, told him that he would make the Jewish nation his ally if he would accede to his proposal. The king having promised to do what was in his power, he asked permission to build a temple somewhere in Egypt and to worship God after the manner of his fathers; for, he added, the Jews would thus be still more embittered against Antiochus, who had sacked their temple at Jerusalem, and more amicably disposed towards himself, and many would flock to him for the sake of religious toleration.

<sup>2</sup> Reprinted by permission of the publishers and the Loeb Classical Library from *Josephus III*, translated by H.St.J. Thackeray (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957) 623-627.

Induced by this statement, Ptolemy gave him a tract, a hundred and eighty furlongs [stadia] distant from Memphis, in the so-called nome of Heliopolis. Here Onias erected a fortress and built his temple (which was not like that in Jerusalem, but resembled a tower) of huge stones and sixty cubits in altitude. The altar, however, he designed on the model of that in the home country, and adorned the building with similar offerings, the fashion of the lampstand excepted; for, instead of making a stand, he had a lamp wrought of gold which shed a brilliant light and was suspended by a golden chain. The sacred precincts were wholly surrounded by a wall of baked brick, the doorways being of stone. The king, moreover, assigned him an extensive territory as a source of revenue, to yield both abundance for the priests and a large provision for the service of God. In all this, however, Onias was not actuated by honest motives; his aim was rather to rival the Jews at Jerusalem, against whom he harboured resentment for his exile, and he hoped by erecting this temple to attract the multitude away from them to it. There had, moreover, been an ancient prediction made some six hundred years before by one named Esaias, who had foretold the erection of this temple in Egypt by a man of Jewish birth. Such, then, was the origin of this temple.

Lupus, the governor of Alexandria, on receipt of Caesar's letter, repaired to the temple and, having carried off some of the votive offerings, shut up the building. Lupus dying soon after, Paulinus, his successor in office, completely stripped the place of its treasures, threatening the priests with severe penalties if they failed to produce them all, prohibited would be worshippers from approaching the precincts, and, closing the gates, debarred all access to the spot. The duration of the temple from its erection to its closure was three hundred and forty-three years.

There are several matters that should briefly be noted at this stage. Unlike the Jerusalem temple, this temple is not completely destroyed. Although Vespasian orders Lupus to destroy the temple (*War* 7,420), it is only closed. Though it is plundered, this is only in stages, since Lupus dies before he can successfully complete the operation. The closure and confiscation of treasures are completed by Lupus' successor Paulinus.<sup>3</sup> Unlike in the case of the Jerusalem temple, there would have been time for the Jews of this temple to hide certain treasures and manuscripts, and some intimation of a suspicion on the part of Paulinus that not all the goods were forthcoming may well be preserved in the comment that "Paulinus . . . (was) threatening the priests with severe

<sup>3</sup> Paulinus is probably attested in P. Oxyrhynchus 1266, line 25, see B.P. Grenfell and A.S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* X (London: Egypt Exploration Fund Graeco-Roman Branch, 1914) 191-194. I am grateful to Anne Marie Luijendijk for this reference.

penalties if they failed to produce them all" (*War* 7,434). This account is rather untidy. The emperor's orders are not fully carried out. The process of the temple's closure provides a loophole for treasure to be secreted away. The account therefore seems raw and unrefined, and presents the Romans as less than efficient, which would possibly be appropriate for a source written soon after reports of the temple's closure were known, by those whose sympathies were not entirely with the Roman authorities. The curious detail that the temple lasted 343 years is a matter we will return to below.

Most importantly, the high priest Onias is here (7,423) identified as the "son of Simon," i.e. the "Onias" is Onias III. In *Ant.* 13,62, it is Onias IV who builds the temple, the son of Onias III. The father of Onias III was Simon II, who is probably to be identified as Simon the Just, esteemed in rabbinic sources (cf. *t.Sot.* 13:6-8; *y.Yoma* 43c; *b.Yoma* 39a, b; *b.Men.* 109b). In rabbinic texts it is also stated that Simon the Just was Onias III's father. Simon the Just also probably appears in *Sirach* 50 as "Simon son of Onias" (i.e. Onias II) who repaired and fortified the Jerusalem temple and was also highly impressive in his cultic performance. In *Antiquities*, Josephus probably wrongly calls Simon I 'Simon the Just' (*Ant.* 12,43; 12,157).<sup>4</sup> With rabbinic literature and *War* agreeing in identifying the builder of the Egyptian temple as Onias III, son of Simon the Just, one might be persuaded, though the current scholarly consensus favours Onias IV. We will return to this later.

In *War*. Josephus gives us important information about Onias III's feelings about the Jews of Jerusalem. In the first place, it is stated that he fled from Jerusalem as a result of Antiochus Epiphanes' war with the Jews and sacking of the temple. He hoped to encourage Jewish anti-Syrian sentiment by building a temple in Egypt and to make the Jewish nation an ally of the Ptolemies (*War* 7,423-4). In addition, Josephus goes on to note that Onias III was in fact resentful of certain Jews at Jerusalem, whom he blamed for his exile, and wished to win the Jewish people away from them by means of his temple in Egypt (*War* 7,431). These Jews are, in *War* 1,31-33, those who supported the Seleucids, including the Tobiads who had apparently prompted Antiochus to invade Jerusalem. It implies that these Jews have gained control of the temple, with its perverted rites, and that Onias III wished to win Jews away from following these new chief priests, or engaging in any rites at a temple which he may have considered impure.

<sup>4</sup> See Ralph Marcus' comments in *Josephus* V (LCL), Appendix B, 732-736.

Josephus does not tell the story of Jason's usurping of the high priesthood (so 2 Macc. 4:7) or problems with Menelaus. In *War* Josephus links Onias III's flight with Antiochus Epiphanes' invasion of Jerusalem and his first sack of the temple as described in 1 Macc. 1:16-28—usually dated 170-169 BCE—but it is blended with the second invasion and absolute ban on sacrifice described in 1 Macc. 1:29-64, dated two years later (1 Macc. 1:29). Antiochus is described as robbing and killing pro-Ptolemaic Jews (*War* 1,32), apparently at his first arrival in Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> Onias III himself was a pro-Ptolemaic Jew, and the internal logic of the story in *War* would demand that he fled for his life at this point, as Josephus indicates here, and that he harboured deep resentment against the pro-Seleucid, hellenizing Jews who had let Antiochus Epiphanes into the city. Nothing is stated as to who became high priest after his flight to Egypt.

Before going on to consider what Josephus states in *Antiquities*, we may also consider here whether it might be possible to suggest a reconstruction which would have Onias III fleeing to Egypt when Antiochus Epiphanes first arrives in Jerusalem, in the light of what is stated in 2 Maccabees. In this work, there is no story of Onias' flight to Egypt, or a building of an alternative temple, but one can explain these omissions on the basis of the author's rhetoric. In this pro-Maccabee work, the high priest Onias is portrayed positively as a virtuous hero, juxtaposed with the villains Jason and Menelaus, and any intimation of actions not condoned by the later Hasmonaeans are not to be found. He therefore becomes a foil for the presentations of Jason and Menelaus. In 2 Maccabees Menelaus incites the Syrian official Andronicus to murder Onias III (2 Macc. 4:30-35), when Onias III had come to Syria and taken refuge in a temple at Daphne near Antioch in order to lodge a complaint against Menelaus' selling of Jerusalem temple treasure. This event appears to be dated to three years after the death of Seleucis IV Philopator in 175 BCE and Jason's usurping of the high priesthood (2 Macc. 4:7; 4:23), i.e. to 172, before the sack of the temple and Onias' flight to Egypt according to *War*. Our two sources—*War* and 2 Maccabees—simply do not fit together into coherence, and the two-stage sequence of assault by Antiochus Epiphanes as described in 1 Maccabees, where Onias is not mentioned, complicates the picture even further. One may conjecture that the story

<sup>5</sup> According to *Antiquities* 12,247 also, Antiochus was let into Jerusalem by "those who were of his party".

of Onias III's murder may have been slotted into the account of 2 Maccabees out of sequence for the purposes of its rhetoric, to introduce Menelaus early on as a villain. Alternatively, it may not be reliable evidence for any reconstruction. The only source for the murder of Onias by Menelaus in Syria is 2 Maccabees. In *Antiquities* 12,237 Onias III conveniently dies with no intimation of there being foul play. Passages commonly cited to support the historicity of the murder—Dan. 9:26; 11:22 and *1 Enoch* 90:8—do not tell the story of a high priest's murder as such. In *1 Enoch* 90:8, the lamb is routed, but not killed. In Dan. 9:26 the Hebrew reads: וְאַחֲרֵי הַשְּׂבָעִים שָׁשִׁים וּשְׁנָיִם יָכֻרָה but וְאַחֲרֵי לִי מְשִׁיחַ וְאַחֲרֵי לִי לִי but יָכֻרָה does not necessarily translate as “he will be killed”. It could also mean “he will be cut off (from his vocation)”<sup>6</sup> and וְאַחֲרֵי לִי would most simply be understood as being “there is not to him” i.e. idiomatically, “he has nothing.” In Dan. 11:22 the Prince of the Covenant will be crushed by the invader (= Antiochus Epiphanes), but it is not stated that he will be murdered. One could rather argue that the story of the murder of Onias conveniently justifies the transferral of the high priesthood from the Zadokites to another group. Jason and Menelaus are corrupt, and Onias is martyred. There are no Zadokite successors mentioned in the work. The murder of the good high priest Onias by the bad usurper Menelaus clears the way for the new good high priests: the Maccabees.

Moreover, whether Onias was murdered may not be the deciding factor on which to judge whether he built the temple in Egypt, since what is really at stake is the dating of his death. Even if murdered in Antioch, one could still argue that he had been to Egypt and gained permission for building a temple there. We do not need to assume that he remained in Jerusalem after his removal from office. Moreover, since the dating of this period is so difficult, it may be better to concentrate rather on a sequential narrative rather than the actual dates as such. One cannot judge the historicity of events on the basis of whether anyone was alive at a certain time, based on a chronology imported from another source to that which is under discussion. According to 2 Maccabees, all the dating of the initial events leading to the cataclysm in Jerusalem are earlier than those of 1 Maccabees. As we saw, 1 Maccabees has the huge attack by Antiochus IV Epiphanes on Egypt

<sup>6</sup> Volkmar Keil, “Onias III—Martyrer oder Tempelgründer?” *ZAW* 97 (1985) 221-33, at 226-228. See also F. Parente “Onias III's Death and the Founding of the Temple of Leontopolis”, in F. Parente and J. Sievers (eds.), *Josephus and the History of the Greco-Roman Period: Essays in Memory of Morton Smith* (Studia Post-Biblica 41; Leiden: Brill, 1994).

and Judaea as being in 170-169 BCE, in the 143rd year of the Kingdom of the Greeks, based on the founding of Antioch in 312 BCE (1 Macc. 1:20). A second attack is dated as taking place two years later, at which time Antiochus Epiphanes forbids sacrifices, and installs an “appalling abomination” upon the altar of burnt offering (1 Macc. 1:29; 1:54). In 2 Maccabees, there is no description of the initial war on Egypt, but rather an acclamation of Antiochus Epiphanes in Jerusalem soon after his accession to the throne (175 BCE). This may have been an appendage to the account of the first attack on Egypt described by Jason of Cyrene, for 2 Maccabees condenses his much longer account (2 Macc. 2:23). The work mentions Antiochus’ “second attack on Egypt” (2 Macc. 5:1) at “about the time” of Menelaus’ seizure of the high priesthood, killing of Onias, riot against Lysimachus and the subsequent punishment of those who led it (2 Macc. 4:23-50). The impression gained is that the redactor, or the author Jason of Cyrene, was rather vague on dates.

It is interesting that in the commentary on the Psalms by Theodorus of Mopsuestia (dated to the late 4th century), the building of the temple by high priest Onias III is inserted into an account that otherwise follows the narrative of 2 Maccabees, replacing the story of the murder of Onias in Daphne.<sup>7</sup> One may wonder on the basis of this whether Theodorus had access to an alternative redaction of Jason’s text, or an alternative version of 2 Maccabees.

### *Jewish Antiquities*

According to Josephus’ *Antiquities* 12-13, written some fifteen or so years after *War*, we get a very different perspective on the temple built by “Onias”, here Onias IV, which shifts the initiative to a later time, possibly c. 162 BCE. Here we find that after the temple in Jerusalem was defiled by Antiochus Epiphanes, and cleansed by Judas Maccabaeus, it was besieged again by Antiochus Eupator, and then (at least partially) destroyed. Following this, Menelaus (described, like Jason, as the brother of Onias III)<sup>8</sup> was killed by the Syrians. The young Onias IV should have been high priest at this point but the Syrians choose Alcimus, from a different priestly house than that of the Zadokites (*Ant.* 12,386-389). At this point in the story Onias IV flees, apparently out of resentment

<sup>7</sup> See Friedrich Baethgen, “Siebenzehn makkabäische Psalmen nach Theodor von Mopsuestia”, *ZAW* 1886, 193-288, at 267-83. I am grateful to Anne Marie Luijendijk for this reference.

<sup>8</sup> In contrast to 2 Macc. 4:23 where Menelaus is the brother of Simon (2 Macc. 3:4).

that he had not been chosen as high priest at this late stage, after enduring all the bloody events of Jerusalem. When his father died, he was apparently a child (*Ant.* 12,237-239). Jason does not usurp the high priesthood: it is given to him quite properly because Onias III's son is too young. Onias IV, after all the catastrophic events that had taken place, establishes an alternative temple in the nome of Heliopolis not because of the pro-Seleucid Jews in Jerusalem, or Antiochus Epiphanes, but because he was hoping "to acquire for himself eternal fame and glory" (*Ant.* 13,62, cf. 20,236). The temple is to fulfill personal ambition only. According to *Antiquities* 12,413-4, when, after four years, Alcimus dies of a stroke, the people throng to bestow the high priesthood on the popular Judas Maccabaeus, and as readers we are probably meant to remember that Onias IV's claims to that office were now dashed forever.

Josephus includes in his account a letter from Onias to the Ptolemies, and a reply from the Ptolemies to Onias, which provide together another version of the founding of the temple. The heart of Josephus' story is found at *Ant.* 13,62-73. The text of the letter from Onias to Ptolemy and Cleopatra reads:<sup>9</sup>

Many and great are the services which I have rendered you in the course of the war, with the help of God, when I was in Coele-Syria and Phoenicia, and when I came with the Jews to Leontopolis in the nome of Heliopolis and to other places where our nation is settled; and I found that most of them have temples, contrary to what is proper, and that for this reason they are ill-disposed toward one another, as is also the case with the Egyptians because of the multitude of their temples and their varying opinions about the forms of worship; and I have found a most suitable place in the fortress called after Bubastis-of-the Fields, which abounds in various kinds of trees and is full of sacred animals, wherefore I beg you to permit me to cleanse this temple, which belongs to no one and is in ruins, and to build a temple to the Most High God in the likeness of that in Jerusalem and with the same dimensions, on behalf of you and your wife and children, in order that the Jewish inhabitants of Egypt may be able to come together there in mutual harmony and serve your interests. For this indeed is what the prophet Isaiah foretold, "There shall be an altar in Egypt to the Lord God," and many other such things did he prophesy concerning this place. (*Ant.* 13,56-68).

<sup>9</sup> Reprinted by permission of the publishers and the Loeb Classical Library from *Josephus*, VII, translated by Rolph Marcus (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1943) 259, 261.

The Ptolemaic royal couple then reply:

King Ptolemy and Queen Cleopatra to Onias, greeting. We have read your petition asking that it be permitted you to cleanse the ruined temple in Leontopolis in the nome of Heliopolis, called Bubastis-in-the-Fields. We wonder, therefore, whether it will be pleasing to God that a temple be built in a place so wild and full of sacred animals. But since you say that the prophet Isaiah foretold this long ago, we grant your request if this is to be in accordance with the Law, so that we may not seem to have sinned against God in any way. (*Ant.* 13,69-71)

Here clearly we have an indication of an anti-Oniad source used by Josephus, while in *War*, the account is relatively impartial, tinged only by criticism of Onias III's motives (and one wonders what motives would have made the initiative acceptable). The temple built by Onias IV in Heliopolis is described, rather disparagingly, as being "smaller and poorer" (*Ant.* 13,72) than that of Jerusalem. In the correspondence recorded between Onias IV and the Ptolemaic rulers, Ptolemy VI Philometor and Cleopatra II are presented as being more fastidious about Jewish law than Onias himself, in objecting to his chosen site on a derelict temple of the cat-goddess Bubastis (*Ant.* 13,69-71), and are reconciled to it only given the prophecy of Isaiah (for which, see below). While in *War* Onias III's motives at least concern Jerusalem and are explained with reference to the terrible events there, the rationale for the temple given in *Antiquities* in the correspondence is that Onias wished to unite Egyptian Jews at the temple in Leontopolis in order that they might serve the interests of the Ptolemies as a unified force. The notion that Jews had many temples (ἱερῶν) in Egypt is strange, though perhaps reference is here made to synagogues. Given these considerations, it is difficult not to feel highly sceptical about its historicity as a whole. The writing of fraudulent documents and letters was an easy way to discredit opponents in antiquity. One need only consider the various inauthentic letters attributed to philosophers such as Epicurus (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 10,3-6) to observe that it was a well-known strategem for propagandists to employ pseudepigraphal material which would portray the opposition in a bad light. It is also too convenient to be credible that the entire discussion on the building of the temple should be recorded on paper in such a simplistic fashion.

The letters are clearly pro-Ptolemaic. They are trying to exonerate the Ptolemies for any implication of impiety in allowing the alternative temple to be built. Here the royal couple are simply responding

to what would have seemed a good idea, if it had worked. They are taken in by the attractive proposition that Onias could have united all the Jews of Egypt, and possibly even the Egyptians of the *chora*, and are convinced by Onias' recourse to a scriptural proof text. The pious royal couple are thereby entirely excused. Such flattery of the Ptolemies would seem to derive from people in pro-Jerusalem Alexandrian Jewish circles who would have sought to pour scorn on the alternative temple in Egypt without wishing to condemn the Ptolemies for permitting its construction. The reasons why the Ptolemies might have allowed it are now perfectly clear, while no good reasons are ascribed to Onias.

Nevertheless, there may be reason to suppose that these false letters were not initially supposed to be linked with Onias IV but with Onias III. The reference to the services rendered by Onias during the course of the war, with the help of God, when he was still in Coele-Syria and Phoenicia is critical in making this identification. The text reads: *πολλὰς καὶ μεγάλας ὑμῖν χρείας τετελεκὸς ἐν τοῖς κατὰ πόλεμον ἔργοις μετὰ τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ βοήθειας, καὶ γινόμενος ἐν τε τῇ κοίλῃ Συρίας καὶ Φοινίκῃ* (*Ant.* 13,65). The "war" must surely refer to the war fought between Ptolemy and Antiochus IV Epiphanes (cf. 1 Macc. 1:16-28). All other accounts indicate that Onias III supported Ptolemy VI Philometor against Antiochus in the war. It would probably have seemed appropriate to those who drafted this letter to have Onias refer to his military support of the Ptolemies. It only served to show how the Ptolemies would have been predisposed to him because of such support. The high priest and ruler of the nation of Judaea would have had the military command and authority to show Ptolemy considerable support. In this letter, he uses it as a justification for his request: since he supported the Ptolemies in the war, so now they should do him a favour. Given the nature of his support, which involved "many and great services", it would have been churlish of the Ptolemies to refuse. Once again, this exonerates the Ptolemaic rulers.

Therefore, we may conclude that after he composed the account of *War* Josephus found a new source to explain the founding of the temple in Egypt in these fraudulent letters mentioning Onias, and was led to believe that these letters were related to Onias IV. Onias III is not presented as anything but a hero in 2 Maccabees, and there may have been some desire on the part of certain people to detach the unfortunate building of the temple in Egypt from him, placing the responsibility with someone else. Since in the letters it is not stated which Onias was responsible for the building of the temple, they could be

attached to his son, Onias IV, rather than Onias III. At face value, of course, the reference to the great support lent to Ptolemy by Onias during the course of the war is problematic given Josephus' description of the sequence of high priests in *Ant.* 12,237-238. Here it is apparent that Onias IV could not have lent Ptolemy any support at all during the war with Antiochus, since Onias IV was an infant at the time Onias III died (c. 172?). No other war is described. Indeed, if the letter is to be ascribed to Onias IV, then those who make historical reconstructions on the basis of its evidence have to conjecture that Onias IV grew up, led an army, and gave Ptolemy considerable support in some other unknown war prior to the time he asked for land to be given to him for the purpose of building a temple.<sup>10</sup> He could apparently lead a force in 145 BCE, almost thirty years after the death of his father.<sup>11</sup> If so, he cannot then have been very old when this death took place, or when he went to Egypt. If he did not establish the temple in the region of Heliopolis until he had been confirmed as a military success, we would have to date the temple possibly as late as 150 BCE.<sup>12</sup> However, Josephus has this decision on the part of Onias IV take place at the accession of Alcimus, which may be dated to 162 BCE. Since he has stated that he was a mere infant (*νήπιος*) in c. 172, the reader is led also to suppose that building an alternative temple for his fame and glory was a hot-headed decision on the part of a youth aged no more than 15. However, Josephus seems quite confused about the individuals of the time around Antiochus IV Epiphanes' routing of Jerusalem. The misidentification of Simon II (see above), the sense that Jason's high priesthood was legitimate, the error in describing Menelaus as Onias III's other brother: all these do not inspire confidence in the source used by Josephus here, which culminates in an identification of the temple-building Onias as Onias IV rather than Onias III himself (who conveniently dies before anything becomes difficult).

<sup>10</sup> See V.A. Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilisation and the Jews* (New York: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1959) 278-281.

<sup>11</sup> According to Apion, in a story which Josephus endorses (*Apion.* 2.49-56), Onias IV marched on Alexandria with a large force to support the queen and widow of Ptolemy, Cleopatra II, against her rival Physcon. This was unfortunate because the crisis was swept away when Cleopatra II agreed to marry Physcon (he ruled as Euergetes II from 145 to 116 BCE), and Onias IV was left in the tricky situation of having seriously offended the new king. The incident does nevertheless show that Onias IV felt exceedingly loyal to Ptolemy VI Philometor and his family.

<sup>12</sup> Gideon Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth and the Jewish Temple in Heliopolis* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1996) 20-22, prefers the later scenario, suggesting that the temple was built after 163 BCE.

Other sources indicate that Onias IV was known in Egypt not as a thwarted high priest preoccupied with gaining fame by building a new temple, but as a pro-Ptolemaic military leader (*Apion*. 2,49-56). Moreover, later in *Antiquities* it is stated that his sons, Chelkias and Ananias, continued to be military leaders very close to the Ptolemaic royal family, and Ananias rejected a chance to renew the dynasty's claim to the high priesthood and leadership of the nation at Jerusalem (*Ant.* 13,353-64).<sup>13</sup> Such a choice does not fit very well with the account earlier in *Antiquities*, which would have the young Onias IV passively enduring the terrible events which befell Jerusalem, only to leave when his personal career goals were stymied. Presumably, according to this account, he would later have jumped at the chance to wage war on Jerusalem and fulfill his ambitions. His son Ananias apparently did not, and argued for peace to be made with Alexander Jannaeus.

One may wonder if the identification of the founder of the Egyptian temple as Onias IV in *Antiquities* may have been designed to lower the religious value of the place. In deeming the temple the work of Onias IV, who was never a high priest, and not the work of a legitimate high priest in Jerusalem, the temple is additionally downgraded. Indeed, the story in *Antiquities* is so obviously negative and muddled, it would possibly be unwise to assert that the identity of the founder of the temple should be Onias IV on the basis of this source alone.<sup>14</sup> In other words, the Onias who built the temple in the nome of Heliopolis may indeed have been Onias III, who fled to Alexandria when Antiochus IV Epiphanes first attacked the city, sacked the temple and "shed much blood" (1 Macc. 1:24). In the region of Heliopolis, he built a small town (πολίχνην) and a similar temple (ναὸν ἔκτισεν ὅμοιον) representing that of Jerusalem (τε τοῖς Ἱεροσολύμοις ἀπεικασμένην) (*War* 1,33). He may not have lived long after his removal to Egypt. That he would go to Antioch to protest against Menelaus, and there meet his death, does not mean we need suggest that he was in Syria all along from the time that he was deprived of the high priesthood.

Rather strangely, it may be that the building of this temple was not one that was considered absolutely contradictory to Torah by all Jews everywhere apart from those who went with Onias to make it possible. In the rabbinic tradition, there are records of debates about whether or not it was legitimate to fulfill a vow at the Egyptian temple and

<sup>13</sup> See Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth*, 32-34.

<sup>14</sup> As does M. Stern, "The Death of Onias III", *Zion* 25 (1960) 1-16 (Heb).

whether it was permissible for priests serving in the “House of Onias” to serve in the temple of Jerusalem (*m.Men.* 13:10; *t.Men.* 13:12-15; *b.Men.* 109b; *Avoda Zara* 52b; *b.Meg.* 10a; *j.Yoma* 6:3; 43d). Quite rightly, Matthias Delcor wonders that the attitude of some of the rabbis was not more severe, and conjectures that the leniency was because the Egyptian sanctuary was founded by a legitimate priest; but Onias IV was not a legitimate high priest, only Onias III was that. A temple built by a militaristic pro-Ptolemaic exile in Egypt may not have evinced the leniency which would make these subjects part of the rabbinic debate agenda. Indeed, the rabbis always believed that Onias the temple-builder was Onias III, the son of Simon the Just (cf. *b.Men.* 109b). Given the importance of the issue, it is hard to accept that they were completely in error.

The Paris papyrus should also be mentioned. If an extant papyrus letter dated to 164 BCE is in fact addressed to “Onias”, apparently the ruler of a certain region in Egypt,<sup>15</sup> the Onias who established the temple in Egypt must have settled in the region of Heliopolis with his supporters by this date, even if the “Onias” to whom the letter is written is his successor. However, the relevant name is not easily distinguished and has been read variously.<sup>16</sup> Because of this, little weight can rest on this letter for a reconstruction of events.

Finally, we may consider logistical issues. The account of Onias IV in *Antiquities* does not make sense in terms of the young child’s safety. His minders (his mother!) would hardly have left Onias IV—the potential ruler of the nation—in the city in view of what seems to have occurred to pro-Ptolemaic Jews in Jerusalem with the seizure of the city by Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Those that could fled.

The account of events in *War* then seems far more reliable as evidence to use for the basis of a historical reconstruction. However, if we read against the grain of the rhetoric of the letters given in *Antiquities*, we may also find something useful here, if we suppose that the letters were originally designed to refer to Onias III. We can cautiously then suggest a reconstruction in which the temple in Egypt was founded by Onias III, after a grim war with Antiochus IV Epiphanes fought by Ptolemy, in which Onias III led the Judaeen army in support of Egypt.

<sup>15</sup> A key question is whether the Paris papyrus (*CPJ* 1.132 = *UPZ.* 110) is really a letter to Onias IV. If so, Onias IV was in Egypt by September 21, 164 BCE. See Joseph M. Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt: from Rameses II to Emperor Hadrian* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1995) 124 for an English text of the letter.

<sup>16</sup> See *CPJ* 1, 245.

This war was fought against Syria without the blessing of all parties in elite circles of Jerusalem, and when Antiochus IV Epiphanes managed to take Jerusalem, pro-Seleucid Jews greeted him with acclaim. Given this, Onias III and pro-Ptolemaic Jews fled quickly to Alexandria. Once there, and seeing the perversions taking place in Jerusalem, Onias III asked for a donation of land from Ptolemy VI Philometor, in order to build a new temple, which would be the focus for a Jewish military colony. Onias III may well have died before its completion. This temple was probably completed during the high priesthood (in Egypt) of his son. It formed the nucleus of a prominent pro-Ptolemaic Jewish military colony, led by Zadokite high priests.

To summarise the ramifications of our conclusions then, if Onias III did build this temple, then we have a situation in which a legitimate Zadokite high priest, robbed of his office, witnessed an opposing high priest altering the temple regulations (Jason), adopting a programme of hellenization, and allowing the Seleucids easy access into the city. The building of the temple in Egypt may well have been in order that a legitimate cult could continue, despite the cessation of its legitimacy in Jerusalem with the radical modifications of the cultus instituted by Jason and then Menelaus. This community in Egypt was highly militarised, and supported the ruling Ptolemies militarily and politically. The militarism is quite in keeping with the fact that as high priest Onias III would have been in command of the army of Judaea, and would have had an experienced group of army veterans who had been fighting the Syrians on the side of the Ptolemies. They may have hoped for a reinstatement of their rule in Judaea in due course, through the help of the great power of Egypt. As it happened, they appear to have continued as a powerful military force in Egypt throughout the remainder of the second century BCE and possibly beyond.

Given this reconstruction, it may be possible also to conjecture that the establishment of the temple would have been done as both a political and a religious act, designed to bolster support for anti-Seleucid Jews in Judaea and the continuation of the proper worship of God at a time when the Jerusalem temple and its cultus would have been considered plundered, altered and defiled. If the temple had been constructed by Onias IV, the impetus would possibly have been seen as anti-Maccabean, but no source tells us this was so. Rather, we may see here an anti-hellenising move, and an attempt to ensure that God was properly worshipped in accordance with the cultic prescriptions of Torah in a kind of new Jerusalem, now situated in Egypt.

*The Temple in Egypt and the Solar Calendar*

While I think it would be rash to assume a definitive connection between those who supported the temple built by Onias in Heliopolis and those who wrote some of the sectarian documents of the Dead Sea Scrolls, one may note cases particularly in the *Damascus Document* which are suggestive of a similar situation to that reconstructed here.<sup>17</sup> CD III,21-IV,4 notes the priests, levites and “sons of Zadok” who maintained the service of God’s temple when the children of Israel strayed, who offer fat and blood, and “who left the land of Judah” (cf. VI,5). Apart from other obvious parallels based on the esteem for the Zadokite priesthood,<sup>18</sup> and the presence of a kind of military colony we find presented in 1QS<sub>a</sub> and 1QM (and fragments),<sup>19</sup> one further similarity may have existed between those who supported the Egyptian temple and those who wrote some of the scrolls found at Qumran: a belief in the solar calendar.

Josephus notes in *War* that in the temple built by Onias III in Heliopolis there was no seven-branched lampstand, but rather a hanging lamp with one single flame which shed “a brilliant light” (*War* 7,428). Robert Hayward has noted that Philo understood the central light of the tabernacle menorah in Jerusalem to be symbolic of the sun (*Vita Mosis* 2.102-103) and that cosmic symbolism concerning the menorah was widespread.<sup>20</sup> Given this understanding, Hayward notes in regard to Onias’ lamp that “the overwhelming probability is that it represented the sun.”<sup>21</sup> He speculates that this innovation may have derived from an interpretation of Isaiah 30:26. The text reads: “the moonlight will be bright as sunlight, and sunlight itself be seven times

<sup>17</sup> This was proposed by S.H. Steckoll, “The Qumran Sect in Relation to the Temple of Leontopolis,” *RQ* 6 (1967), 55-69. See also Robert Hayward, “The Jewish Temple at Leontopolis: A Reconsideration,” *JJS* 33 (1982), 429-43. Like Steckoll, Hayward explores the possible association between the temple built by Onias in Heliopolis and the Qumran scrolls, noting the suggestive references of CD IV,2; VI,5; VIII,16; XVI,1.

<sup>18</sup> I do not wish to present the esteem for the Zadokite priesthood as monolithic in the extant Scrolls, since there may be alterations in the status given to the Zadokites in different communities. For some discussion of how that may be reflected in texts, see: Robert Kugler, “A Note on 1QS 9:14: The Sons of Righteousness of the Sons of Zadok”, *Dead Sea Discoveries* 3 (1996) 315-320.

<sup>19</sup> 4Q491, 492, 493, 494, 495, 496 and other related military texts: 4Q285 and 4Q471.

<sup>20</sup> Hayward, “Jewish Temple”, 434-6. See *Jos. Ant.* 3,145-6; 3,182; *Targ. Ps. Jon.* Exod. 39:37; 40:4; *Num. Rab.* 15:7.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 435.

brighter, like the seven days in one, on the day that YHWH dresses his people's wound, and heals the scars of the blows they have received." Moreover, the *Targum of Isaiah* refers to  $7 \times 7 \times 7$  (= 343) years that light will shine on the chosen people of God, on the day that he shall bring back the exiled people.<sup>22</sup> In *War* 7,436 it is mentioned by Josephus that the temple built by Onias in Heliopolis survived 343 years, that is a week of jubilee years ( $7 \times 49 = 343$ ).<sup>23</sup> Such a coincidence seems to indicate some kind of meditation on the significance of multiples of 7 in Josephus' source.

Whether Onias III based himself on an interpretation of Isa. 30:26 is of course impossible to prove, but it is something that may be included in our reconstruction as a plausible hypothesis on the basis of the evidence. If the single lamp was representative of the single light of the sun, then it may indicate an acceptance of a solar calendar, since the light of the sun would have been considered to be in some way "godly."<sup>24</sup> The equinoxes appear to be very important in the symbolic architectural plan of the temple in 11QT and also in *1 Enoch*, where the spring equinox occurs when the sun is at the "great gate" (72:6), but we do not know what architectural plan was used for the temple built by Onias in Heliopolis, even if Josephus' source in *War* 1,33 described it as just like the Jerusalem temple.<sup>25</sup> In *War* 7,427 he qualifies this statement by stating that it was not exactly like the Jerusalem temple after all, but more like a tower sixty cubits high. The Egyptian temple in its small temple-city was intended to copy Jerusalem and its temple, and yet was not exactly the same. Nevertheless, as Hayward has pointed out, the temple in Jerusalem itself could be described as a tower, and appears to have been sixty cubits high.<sup>26</sup> Josephus seems to want to

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 436, followed by Modrzejewski, *Jews of Egypt*, 128-9.

<sup>23</sup> This number cannot be right, and is clearly "spiritualised". If one were to take it literally, as does M.A. Beek, "Relations entre Jérusalem et la diaspora égyptienne au 2e siècle avant J.C.", *Outestamentische Studien* 2 (1943), 119-143, at 126, one would need to argue that the temple was founded in the 3rd century BCE. I am grateful to Anne Marie Luijendijk for this reference.

<sup>24</sup> Hayward, "Jewish Temple", 435, notes that in Ps. 84:11-12 YHWH "is a sun": solar symbolism applied to YHWH in the Hebrew scriptures could certainly have intensified the significance of the sun in Onias' cult.

<sup>25</sup> See Margaret Barker, "The Temple Measurements and the Solar Calendar", in George Brooke (ed.), *Temple Scroll Studies* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 62-66, at 65. The "great gate" of *1 En.* 72:6 is, according to Barker, "presumably the name for the central eastern gate through which the sun's light could reach the Temple".

<sup>26</sup> Hayward, "Jewish Temple", 432-4; see: *1 En.* 89:50, cf. 54, 56:66,67,73. For the height of the Temple see: *Ezra* 6:3; *1 Esdr.* 6:24.

affirm that it was not the identical temple that Onias III and his supporters had wanted (after all, how could anything else compare?).

In addition, we may note the intriguing fragments from the writings of Aristobulus, who is like Onias III associated with the Egyptian king Ptolemy VI Philometor. He is described in 2 Macc. 1:10 as the king's teacher (of Jewish philosophy)—his διδάσκαλος—and a member of “the family of the anointed priests,” identifications which may well be right,<sup>27</sup> and which would clearly make him a Zadokite. According to Aristobulus, the date of the Passover should be fixed to the time of the vernal equinox (Fr. 1; Eus. *Hist. Eccles.* 7.32.16-18), since this connects the festival with an important natural (solar) occurrence. Moreover, for Aristobulus, Passover is “in the middle of the first month”: Nisan is the first month not in the normative Jewish calendar but in the solar calendar of *Jubilees*, *1 Enoch* and the *Temple Scroll*.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, we know so little about Aristobulus that this can remain no more than an interesting snippet, but it is intriguing that he was associated with the court of Ptolemy VI Philometor and Cleopatra II at precisely the time we find Onias III there.

### *The Location of the Temple*

The siting of the temple built by Onias III in Heliopolis itself may be telling, Heliopolis means “city of the sun.” Josephus repeatedly stresses its situation in the Heliopolitan nome (*War* 1,33; 7,426; *Ant.* 12,388; 13,65; 13,70; 13,285; 20,236). According to Josephus (*Ant.* 13,64; 13,68; 13,71; *War* 7,432), Onias found his mandate for the building of the temple in the region of Heliopolis in prophecy of Isaiah, 600 years earlier, in which it was stated that there will be an altar to YHWH in Egypt built by a Jewish man.

<sup>27</sup> For issues of identification see N. Walter, *Der Thorausleger Aristobulus: Untersuchungen zu seinen Fragmenten und zu pseudepigraphischen Resten der Jüdisch hellenistischen Literatur* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1964), 35-123, who is negative about the historicity of 2 Macc.; but also Ariyeh Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1985) 62 and Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*, transl. by John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974) ii, 105-7, nn. 373, 378, who are positive. Aristobulus' writings are quoted by Eusebius of Caesarea, *Hist. Eccles.* 7.32.16-18; *Praep. Evang.* 7:14; 8:10:1-17; 13:12.1-2,3-8,9-16 and Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 1.150.1-3. See for an English translation: Adela Yarbro Collins, “Aristobulus”, in James Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* ii (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985) 831-842.

<sup>28</sup> Philo explains that Nisan is called the first month in Scripture (Exod. 12:6)—when it is really the seventh—because it is first “in power” (*Spec. Leg.* 2,152-155).

Josephus' wording in *Ant.* 13,68 is a very close rendering of what is found in the Septuagint version of Isa. 19:19.<sup>29</sup> According to Isa. 19:18 in the Masoretic Text there will be five cities in the land of Egypt speaking the language of Canaan, one named: עיר ההרס, "city of destruction." However, an early manuscript tradition attested by the Vulgate, Symmachus, Sa'adya ha-Gaon and now also 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> from the Qumran texts have for this city עיר ההרס, "the city of the sun". Which manuscript version came first may not be possible to determine on the basis of the evidence. Josephus is consistent in his attestation that the temple is not in Heliopolis the city, but Heliopolis the nome. Where Heliopolis the city is referred to in the MT, the term used is און or כה שמש (cf. Gen. 41:45; 41:50; 46:20; Jer. 43:13), and one may wonder whether in using עיר ההרס there may be some attempt to distinguish the site from כה שמש proper in Egypt. The Targum of Isaiah conflates the meaning of the two readings, and therefore does preserve the name of Heliopolis as it was ordinarily found: קרתא בית שמש דעתידא, למחרב, "the house of the sun that will be destroyed" (cf. *b.Men.* 110a). Not entirely irrelevant also is the fact that the LXX "translates" the reference to the city of Isa. 19:18 as πόλις ασεδεκ, i.e. עיר הצדק the city of righteousness, used in Isa. 1:26-27 to refer to Jerusalem.<sup>30</sup> In the uncorrected Sinaiticus, some kind of abbreviated conflation is found: ασεδ ήλιου. The root צדק is that of Zadok (צדוק) also, though one can but speculate on the significance of this.

There is evidence of considerable fascination with the area of Heliopolis in the Second Temple period. It was the capital of the 13th nome in Lower Egypt, and situated on the Pelusiac branch of the Nile, which at Pelusium connected with the road northward to Judaea. It is now identified as Tell H̄isn. The city itself was supposedly the home of Asenath, Joseph's wife (Gen. 41:45; 41:50; 46:20; *Joseph and Asenath* 1-3), and Joseph was believed to have settled his father and brothers there (*Artapanus Frag.* 2, 23.3; *Jos. Ant.* 2,188). The LXX of Exod. 1:11 lists Heliopolis as one of three cities the Israelites rebuilt. According to Josephus, a tradition used by Apion against the Jews associated Moses with Heliopolis (*Apion.* 2,10-11). He is described as praying in the direction of the sun, and building a kind of sundial in which a

<sup>29</sup> As noted by Anne Marie Luijendijk. The LXX text of Isa. 19:19a reads: τῆ ἡμερᾶ ἐκείνῃ ἔσται θυσιαστήριον τῷ κυρίῳ ἐν χώρᾳ Αἰγυπτίων. *Jos. Ant.* 13,68 reads: ἔσται θυσιαστήριον ἐν Αἰγυπτῷ κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ.

<sup>30</sup> See M. Delcor, "Le temple d'Onias en Egypte", *RB* 75 (1968), 188-205 at 196-7; Hayward, "Jewish Temple", 438-441.

shadow of columns fell on a central pit, a tradition which probably arose as a result of the identification of Moses as Osarsiph, the priest of Heliopolis (*Apion*. 1,238,250). Notably, as Gideon Bohak has recently pointed out, the story of Joseph and Asenath (17,6) may allude directly to the temple built by Onias in Heliopolis as “the city of refuge”.<sup>31</sup>

The second-century CE geographer Claudius Ptolemy (*Geog.* 4,5,24, 53) seems to indicate that the region around Heliopolis was named Ὀνίου, as does Eusebius (*Chron.* 2,126) and also Jerome (*Chron.* 127).<sup>32</sup> Josephus refers to the “district of Onias,” ἡ Ὀνίου χωρὰ (*Ant.* 13.65; 14.131; *War* 1,190; 7,421), and confirmation of the name has been found in a funerary inscription probably from Tell el-Yehoudieh, where “the land that nourished” a young woman named Arsinoe is called δ’ Ὀνίου.<sup>33</sup> The ancient Egyptian city of Heliopolis was itself called *Iwnw*; one cannot know what significance, if any, this may have had for Onias and his supporters, but one may suggest that it could have been considered a divine confirmation of the rightness of the location.<sup>34</sup>

No source indicates that the temple built by Onias was in the heart of Heliopolis, even though Heliopolis seems to be significant in Jewish tradition in various ways. Josephus is precise in placing the temple in the nome of Heliopolis but not in the city itself. The only mention in our ancient sources for the temple at Leontopolis is in the pseudepigraphical correspondence Josephus records between Onias IV and Ptolemy VI Philometor and Cleopatra II. Here, in *Antiquities*, it is stated that Onias IV, “came with the Jews to Leontopolis in the nome of Heliopolis and to other places where our nation is settled” (*Ant.* 13,65) and asked to build a temple at the site of τῆς ἀγρίας Βουβάστεως (*Ant.* 13,66). In the response from the royal couple, however, it is stated that they read Onias IV’s petition to cleanse the ruined temple in Leontopolis in the nome of Heliopolis called the “Bubastis in the Fields” or “Wild Bubastis” (*Ant.* 13,70). If it is correct that the letters were composed by anti-Oniad, pro-Ptolemaic Jews in Alexandria, it may well be possible that these people knew of the exact location of the temple built by Onias, and used this location in order to undermine the religiosity of Onias. However, one needs to be careful to distinguish the place

<sup>31</sup> Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth*, 16-17.

<sup>32</sup> See *ibid.* 25, n. 32 and n. 33.

<sup>33</sup> W. Horbury and D. Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992) 90. A reference to the land “of Onias” may also be present in the fragmentary inscription Οὐίωου πατήρ (CIJ ii. 1455), see Horbury and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, 111.

<sup>34</sup> See Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth*, 90-91.

named Leontopolis in the nome of Heliopolis from Leontopolis proper. The large city of Leontopolis was well known and is identified today as Tell-Muqdam.<sup>35</sup> It was also not Bubastis, the city of Bast. The city of Bubastis, is identified as Belbis or Tell Basta, and is well attested in other literature (e.g. Herodotus, *Hist.* 2,137; Strabo, *Geogr.* 17:1:19 (802C); Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 5:9:49). Neither the well-known Leontopolis or Bubastis were in the Heliopolitan nome. There is no evidence of these sites being built over with a Jewish temple in the 2nd century BCE though there may have been a Jewish colony near Bubastis, since another probable once-Jewish town called Tell el-Yehoud is located some 6 miles south of Belbis at a site named Gheyata.<sup>36</sup> However, temples of the cat or lion goddess Bast have been found elsewhere in the region, since the goddess was widely worshipped in the area<sup>37</sup> and it is not intrinsically improbable that a ruined temple of this goddess might have been cleansed and converted to the use of refugees from Judaea, near Heliopolis. The name "Leontopolis" may have arisen out of the use made of lion images in the cult of the goddess. It would not have been inappropriate as a name for a site associated with Bast.

It is at this stage we may turn to consider archaeological evidence from Tell el-Yehoudieh, a site located some 3 km. south of Shibin al-Kantir, and about 13 km. north of ancient Heliopolis. Here there are remains of an enclosed temple and inhabited area on the edge of an ancient Hyksos site, and a Hellenistic-Roman period township outside the walls. After a flurry of initial enthusiasm that this was indeed the site of the temple built by Onias in Heliopolis nome, there has been recent scepticism about this identification. The site was explored in the 1880's by Naville and Griffith<sup>38</sup> and then again by Flinders Petrie, who published a detailed plan of the remains of what he thought was a temple and fortress (located on the north-eastern side of the old Hyksos temple-city) which was designed to replicate Jerusalem.<sup>39</sup> Later,

<sup>35</sup> See for this, Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth*, 27-28.

<sup>36</sup> Kasher, *Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, 120, 121, who notes that this is probably to be identified with the "village of the Jews" mentioned in the *Itinerarium Antonini* 42.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 120. At Sefata, 3 miles south-west of Zagazig, a limestone stela was discovered which depicted King Nefer-ka-re offering a field—perhaps the entire region—to Bast, see Shehata Adam, "Recent Discoveries in the Eastern Delta (Dec. 1950-May 1955)", *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte* 55 (1958) 301-324, at 307.

<sup>38</sup> E. Naville and F.L. Griffith, *The Mound of the Jews and the City of Onias* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1890).

<sup>39</sup> W.M. Flinders Petrie, *Hyksos and Israelite Cities* (London: British School of Archaeology, 1906) 19-27.

Compte Mesnil du Buisson examined the site again and argued against some of Flinders Petrie's observations, while yet still maintaining that this was a fortress established by Onias.<sup>40</sup> The inscriptions from Tell el-Yehoudieh have been re-published recently by William Horbury and David Noy, and indicate a community which chose to have inscriptions made in Greek. Dates are given according to the Egyptian calendar only.<sup>41</sup> Ariyeh Kasher, who is one modern historian to consider the site authentic as the location of the temple built by Onias, notes that the community was "well established economically" and could make its own decisions (as a *politeuma*).<sup>42</sup> Most importantly for the purposes of identification, the Hyksos site was very likely a centre for the worship of Bast. A statue of Horus holding the shrine of Bast was found<sup>43</sup> and three statues.<sup>44</sup>

As for the temple, if Flinders Petrie's plan is relatively accurate, it should be noted that it is not particularly like any form of temple that existed in Jerusalem. If the building distinguished by Flinders Petrie is the temple built by Onias,<sup>45</sup> its main feature is that it is built on a hill, which would have been an excellent look-out post, and that it would have resembled a fortress (*Ant.* 13,66). According to Josephus, the temple built by Onias III was intended to look like that of Jerusalem, and the small city around it was modelled on Jerusalem (*War* 1,33; *Ant.* 12,388), but it probably did not succeed in being anything like a replica. In the negative tradition of *Ant.* 13,71 it is "smaller and poorer" and in *War* 7,427 the temple is described as being more like a (military?) tower, 60 cubits high, built of large stones. The wall surrounding the temple enclosure is described as being of baked brick, with stone gates (*War* 7,427-430). The existing walls of the enclosure at Tell el-Yehoudieh at the time of Flinders Petrie were stone with brick casing in places,

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<sup>40</sup> Mesnil du Buisson, "Compte rendue sommaire d'une mission à Tell el-Yahoudiyée", *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale* 29 (1929) 155-177; id. "Le temple d'Onias et le camp Hyksôs a Tell el Yahoudiyé", *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale* 35 (1935) 59-71. For other examinations of features of the site see: G.J. Chester, "A Journey to the Biblical Sites in Lower Egypt", *PEFQS* (1880) 136-8; T. Hayter Lewis, "Tel el-Yahoudeh (The Mound of the Jew)", *Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 7 (1881) 177-192; C.C. Edgar, "Tomb-stones from Tell el-Yahoudieh", *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte* 19 (1920) 216-224; Adam, "Recent Discoveries".

<sup>41</sup> Horbury and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, 29-105 (= CIJ II.1451-1530).

<sup>42</sup> Kasher, *Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, 123, 125-130.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* 20.

<sup>44</sup> Adam, "Recent Discoveries", 305, 311-12.

<sup>45</sup> See Hayward, "Jewish Temple", and R. De Vaux, "Post-Scriptum" to Delcor, "Le temple d'Onias", 204-5.

and in the lower north side of the site there were remains of a “massive brick retaining-wall along the whole length”.<sup>46</sup>

In the account of *War* 7,421-36, Josephus tells us that the temple built by Onias III was located 180 stadia from Memphis. Other later sources mention that the distance from Memphis to Heliopolis itself was 24 Roman miles (Egeria, *Itin*, in Peter the Deacon Y2<sup>47</sup> 204; *Itinerarium Antonini* 163). Gideon Bohak determines that 180 stadia would translate as approximately 22.5 Roman miles and concludes from this that “it seems clear that Onias’ temple was located inside, or very close to, ancient Heliopolis”.<sup>48</sup> In fact, there was a Jewish community approximately 2 miles south of Heliopolis, at a place now known as Demerdash: a site that would indeed be about 180 Greek stadia from Memphis, and about 22 Roman miles.

The site of Demerdash, just south of Heliopolis, has not been excavated, apart from the cemetery, where Jewish inscriptions were recovered.<sup>49</sup> However, Ariyeh Kasher has argued persuasively by an analysis of the military logistics involved in Josephus’ description that the site called by Josephus τὸ Ἰουδαίων στρατόπεδον (*Ant.* 14,133) was just south of Heliopolis, which would correspond very well with Demerdash. If Demerdash was the site of the Jewish temple, just south of Heliopolis proper, then it is possible that Josephus avoided using a reference to the actual name of the site—whatever it was—so as not to make another detour on the subject of Onias’ temple, and chose only to indicate that this was where the main Jewish stronghold was to be found. On the other hand, why would he have avoided mentioning it? Identifications of sites on the basis of ancient reckonings of distances are notoriously problematic, and therefore Josephus’ mention of 180 stadia could be taken rather loosely.

<sup>46</sup> Flinders Petrie, *Hyksos and Israelite Cities*, 21.

<sup>47</sup> See John Wilkinson, *Egeria’s Travels*, rev. edn. (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1981) 204.

<sup>48</sup> Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth*, 29. However, one should probably note also that in Hellenistic and early Roman Egypt, the unit of measure roughly equivalent to the Greek stadion was a length of 500 cubits; such way-marks were noted by Flinders Petrie along the Fayum road. This was in fact a third longer than a stadion. If such way-marks were used, the temple built by Onias was located further away from Memphis than Heliopolis. Flinders Petrie places Tell el-Yehoudieh at 186 way-marks from Memphis, if these were reckoned as 500 cubits apart, see Flinders Petrie, *Hyksos and Israelite Cities*, 20.

<sup>49</sup> C.C. Edgar, “A Group of Inscriptions from Demerdash”, *Bulletin de la Société Archéologie d’Alexandrie* 15 (1914-15) 32-38. For excavations in Heliopolis proper see: Abdel-Aziz Saleh, *Excavations in Heliopolis: Ancient Egyptian Oun.u* (Cairo: Cairo University Press, 1981).

Moreover, Tell el-Yehoudieh is distinctive for its height in a way that Demerdash is not. While the sources for the identification of Tell el-Yehoudieh do not reconcile themselves in a way which would make for easy conclusions, no one doubts that this area was a centre for Jews located in the region called "the land of Onias". Two inscriptions in ancient Hebrew were found here,<sup>50</sup> along with monumental architecture highly reminiscent of Jerusalem styles dated to the Second Temple Period.<sup>51</sup> Unfortunately, Flinders Petrie's plans of the structures at the top of the hill can no longer be confirmed or denied, because the site has suffered considerable destruction by the local residents.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, architectural features of the region do seem to indicate that a monumental structure was built at the top, accessed by a grand staircase with plastered walls, and that this was some kind of fortress may be suggested also by the presence of ballista balls on site, hurled into the area in order to capture the stronghold, sometime in the Roman period.<sup>53</sup>

The name, Tell el-Yehoudieh, was explained by Griffith as meaning "Mound of Judaea",<sup>54</sup> which suggests not only that the occupants of the place were Jews, but it was a little Judaea of some kind. Flinders Petrie saw in Tell el-Yehoudieh the outline of an alternative Jerusalem in the way that the temple he distinguished was built, situated on a hill between two valleys (the Tyropoean and the Kidron).<sup>55</sup> Curiously, however, it seems more reminiscent of Mount Gerizim, though the Mount Gerizim we know from a slightly later time. The main landmark we know from Roman Mount Gerizim in Samaria was a flight of steps leading up to the summit, as can be seen on coins dating from the mid second century CE onwards.<sup>56</sup> The steps themselves have not

<sup>50</sup> See Chester, "Journey", 137.

<sup>51</sup> See Flinders Petrie's photographs, Plate XXV, and figures on Plate XXVII.

<sup>52</sup> This was also reported to have taken place in the last century. Chester, "Journey", 138, noted how the local Egyptians destroyed antiquities found there: statues were "deliberately broken up". Reasons for this may be anti-Jewish feeling; a massacre of Jews in the area was reported by Edgar. It may have been for fear of reprisals by authorities who disapproved of illegal excavations. The heads of skeletons seem to have been used for magical purposes. Any limestone blocks recovered were burnt to use as plaster, including the blocks from a monumental Hyksos gateway, and the area was dug up for manure for the fields.

<sup>53</sup> Flinders Petrie, *Hyksos and Israelite Cities*, 26.

<sup>54</sup> Naville and Griffith, *Mound*, 58.

<sup>55</sup> Flinders Petrie, *Hyksos and Israelite Cities*, 27.

<sup>56</sup> The coins date from the time of Antoninus Pius. How much earlier we may date the stairs has not been resolved by excavations.

been securely dated, though the existing temple remains on Tell er-Ras appear to derive from the second century CE.<sup>57</sup> Josephus refers to a structure built by Sanballat in the 4th cent. BCE (*Ant.* 2,306-311; 2, 321-25) but no vestige of this has as yet been found on the mount.<sup>58</sup> One may conjecture that stairs led to this structure nevertheless, which were then improved and extended in the Roman period. In Tell el-Yehoudieh, the most striking feature was a huge staircase with plastered sides leading up to a structure at the summit.<sup>59</sup> There is also a stamp which has the abbreviations of two Greek letters: Flinders Petrie thought it may read Π N but turned another way it reads either E Z or Γ Z: the latter would fit with a reading of Γαριζείν.<sup>60</sup> This must remain yet another obscure detail in the archaeology of the site. At present little can be said conclusively about the nature of the remains at Tell el-Yehoudieh, and only proper excavation of the site will be able to clarify the nature of the buildings there further. It may be the site of the temple built by Onias, or alternatively the temple may have been located further south at Demerdash, and this may be a sister city or fortress. It is improbable that anything will be found in Demerdash, since the area is now covered with Cairo's urban sprawl. Heliopolis (Tell Ḥisn) itself lies close to the international airport, and some of its antiquities are likewise in danger of obliteration.

### *Conclusion*

Such is the evidence for the second Jewish temple in Egypt. It seems clear to me that a renewed survey of the site of Tell el-Yehoudieh and other Jewish remains in the region is badly needed. Political tensions have made it almost impossible for a Jewish site to be properly surveyed or excavated in Egypt, but perhaps there will be some chance for this work to take place in future years, given the goodwill and co-operation of both archaeologists and local residents.

Furthermore, the connection between the "Zadokites" of the documents in the Dead Sea Scrolls corpus and the Zadokites of the Egyptian

<sup>57</sup> For a concise discussion, see E. Stern (ed.), *New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1993), II, 488-90.

<sup>58</sup> It should be remembered that the lack of evidence of a structure attested in ancient sources does not mean that it never existed; it simply means we have not been able to find it.

<sup>59</sup> See Flinders Petrie, *Hyksos and Israelite Cities*, 23.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* Plate XXVII.

temple built by Onias III should surely be investigated further. If the group which lived in Qumran and other sites southwards along the Dead Sea were led by Zadokites,<sup>61</sup> then what were their connections with the Zadokite group in Egypt? The origins of the groups evidenced in the Scrolls may yet be more complex than hitherto supposed. Finally, it may perhaps be worth remembering that the *Damascus Document* was originally found down the road from Heliopolis, in Cairo. An Egyptian link has been there all along.

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<sup>61</sup> Whether these "Zadokites" may be linked with types of "Sadducees" or "Essenes" may remain open to question. The problem is that we do not know whether the Sadducees and the Essenes had a common sectarian ancestry within certain priestly circles in Jerusalem. Many scholars presume absolute difference, when in fact we are in great ignorance about the origins of these groups and how they related. For the Sadducee possibility, and discussion of the "Zadokite" characteristics of the Scrolls, see I. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Philadelphia/Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society, 1994).