

# Artapanus as a Source for the Building of the Temple of Onias in Egypt

Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha

2020, Vol. 29(3) 197–214

© The Author(s) 2020

Article reuse guidelines:

[sagepub.com/journals-permissions](https://sagepub.com/journals-permissions)

DOI: 10.1177/1868103420913773

[journals.sagepub.com/home/jsp](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/jsp)**Meron M Piotrkowski**

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

## Abstract

In scholarly literature, one frequently encounters the claim that Artapanus supplies the only reference to the building of the Temple of Onias in the entire extant corpus of Jewish-Hellenistic literature. While this assumption has found acceptance, this article wishes to investigate that claim. While Artapanus indeed incorporated a reference to the building of a temple by Jews in Heliopolis—the same place, where Josephus located the Temple of Onias—it seems, however, that what Artapanus had in mind was not the Jewish Temple of Onias, but the famed Egyptian Temple of Atum-Ra. This insight is supported by passages of ancient Hellenistic writers such as Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus, who, as Artapanus, contain similar references, to which the latter appears to allude. Artapanus' note may thus be explained by the notion that the piece of information about Jews being responsible for the building of a famous Egyptian temple fulfills an apologetic purpose and served to aggrandize the Jewish presence in the Egyptian Diaspora.

## Keywords

Artapanus, Heliopolis, Jewish-Hellenistic literature, Temple of Onias

## Introduction

Anyone who deals with the history of the Temple of Onias will soon discover that there is an irksome dearth of sources on this particular episode of ancient Jewish history. One occasionally gets the impression that this frustrating absence of sources is overcome in modern scholarship by generating sources where there are none. This is commonly achieved by over-interpreting any possible reference in any given literary or epigraphic source.<sup>1</sup> A particular case in point is a reference by the ancient Egyptian-Jewish author

1. For example, see Kent J. Rigsby, “A Jewish Asylum in Graeco-Roman Egypt,” in *Das Antike Asyl [The Ancient Asylum]* (ed. Martin Dreher; Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2003), 127–41, who unconvincingly argues that the inscription *CIJ* 1449 (= *JIGRE* 125), granting the right of asylum to a synagogue, actually refers to the Temple of Onias; see also Meron M. Piotrkowski, *Priests in Exile: The History of the Temple of Onias and Its Community in the Hellenistic Period* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2019), 21 (n. 85).

## Corresponding author:

Meron M Piotrkowski, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, The Department of the History of the Jewish People and Contemporary Judaism, Mt. Scopus, 9195051 Jerusalem, Israel.

Email: [meron.piotrkowski@mail.huji.ac.il](mailto:meron.piotrkowski@mail.huji.ac.il)

Artapanus to the building of a temple at Heliopolis by Jews.<sup>2</sup> Based on textual evidence from the first century CE Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, which attests the existence of a Jewish temple, the so-called Temple of Onias, in the Heliopolite nome, some scholars have seen here a possible allusion to the building of the Temple of Onias.<sup>3</sup> If so, this would notably be the one and only reference to the Temple of Onias in the entire extant corpus of ancient Jewish-Hellenistic literature, save for Josephus.<sup>4</sup> In what follows, we shall examine the validity of this claim and scrutinize the relevant passages in Artapanus, as well as texts by other ancient non-Jewish and Jewish writers.

## Artapanus and the (Jewish?) Temple of Heliopolis

Very little is known about the ancient Jewish historian Artapanus. For example, the precise date of his *floruit* remains disputed, although a date ranging from 250 to 100 BCE is commonly assumed in modern scholarship.<sup>5</sup> Some even contest(ed)

- 
2. Frg. 2 (23.4) in Carl R. Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors: Volume 1: Historians* (SBL; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1983), 207. All citations, translations and numberings of Artapanus' fragments derive from Holladay unless indicated otherwise.
  3. For example, Martin Delcor, "Le temple d'Onias en Égypte," *RB* 75 (1968): 201–203; E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian. A Study in Political Relations* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 368 n. 42; and more cautiously, Holladay, *Fragments*, 230 n. 28; Walter Ameling, "Die jüdische Gemeinde von Leontopolis nach den Inschriften," in *Die Septuaginta: Texte, Kontexte, Lebenswelten* (ed. Martin Karrer, Wolfgang Kraus and Martin Meiser; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 121 n. 14; Jörg Frey, "Temple and Rival Temple - the Cases of Elephantine, Mt. Gerizim, and Leontopolis," in *Gemeinde ohne Tempel: Zur Substituierung und Transformation des Jerusalemer Tempels und seines Kultes im Alten Testament, antiken Judentum und frühen Christentum* (ed. Beate Ego et al.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 187 n. 99; and see also Johnson's remarks on this issue in Sara R. Johnson, *Historical Fictions and Hellenistic Jewish Identities: Third Maccabees in Its Cultural Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 105–106 n. 47.
  4. Scholars usually, and for good reason, bemoan that the Temple of Onias finds no recognition elsewhere, particularly by Philo, see e.g. Victor Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* (New York: JPS, 1959), 278; Delcor, "Le temple d'Onias," 203; Frey, "Temple and Rival Temple," 187, 192; Ameling, "Die jüdische Gemeinde von Leontopolis," 120. For the possible reasons for Philo's silence regarding this matter, see Piotrkowski, *Priests in Exile*, 209–10.
  5. Artapanus' writings were preserved by Alexander Polyhistor (ca. 50 BCE), determining a *terminus ad quem* for them. See e.g. Carl R. Holladay, *Theios Aner in Hellenistic Judaism: A Critique of the Use of This Category in New Testament Christology* (Diss. Series SBL 40; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977), 199–232; Holladay, *Fragments*, 189–90; John M. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 127, 446; John J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 39. For a later dating, namely 150–100 BCE, see John J. Collins, "Artapanus," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; 2 vols.; Garden City: Doubleday, 1985), 2:890–91 and David Flusser and Shua Amorai-Stark, "The Goddess Thermuthis, Moses and Artapanus," *JSQ* 1 (1993–1994): 225. Recently, the case has been convincingly made for dating Artapanus' work to the period of civil unrest in Egypt under Ptolemy VIII Physcon, see Holger Zellentin "The End of Jewish Egypt: Artapanus and the Second Exodus," in *Antiquity in Antiquity*

his Jewishness,<sup>6</sup> but it is the focus on Egypt in Artapanus' work that is a fundamental factor in assuming his Egyptian-Jewish background.<sup>7</sup> Where exactly Artapanus wrote is unknown, but it has been claimed that it was not Alexandria, perhaps a location somewhere in the Egyptian *chora*.<sup>8</sup>

The bulk of Artapanus' work—so we must assume—is lost. Alexander Polyhistor collected his work, but only three meager fragments survived. His work was referred to by Eusebius and thus preserved.<sup>9</sup> The extant fragments of Artapanus' work, which probably was entitled “Concerning the Jews (Περὶ Ἰουδαίων),” cover the exploits of the biblical patriarchs—Abraham, Joseph and Moses—in Egypt.<sup>10</sup> These fragments feature a number of references—four in all—to the ancient Egyptian city of Heliopolis and/or its

---

(ed. Kevin Osterloh and Gregg Gardner; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), 27–73. See also John J. Collins, “Artapanus Revisited,” in *From Judaism to Christianity: Tradition and Transition. A Festschrift for Thomas H. Tobin, S.J., on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (ed. Patricia Walters; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 62, 66; Rob Kugler, “Hearing the Story of Moses in Ptolemaic Egypt: Artapanus Accommodates the Traditions,” in *The Wisdom of Egypt. Jewish, Early Christian, and Gnostic Essays in Honour of Gerard P. Luttikhuisen* (ed. Anthony Hillhorst and George H. v. Kooten; Leiden: Brill 2005), 69.

6. For a recent claim that Artapanus was a pagan, see Howard Jacobson, “Artapanus Judaeus,” *JJS* 57 (2006): 210–21 and the literature cited there (p. 213, n. 11), summarizing the evolution of the debate on Artapanus' Jewishness. Jacobson's arguments are, in my view, not persuasive. No pagan writer would reveal that much interest in Jews, the Exodus, and the patriarchs, let alone the efforts to glorify the latter's deeds and to underline the superiority of Jews and Judaism (and describing their God as the maser of the universe). See also Collins, “Artapanus Revisited,” 59–62. Peter M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (3 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 1:706; 2:985 (n. 199) argues that Artapanus was a Jew of mixed descent on account of his Persian name. See on the issue also Holladay, *Theios Aner*, 201–204.
7. Robert Doran, “The Jewish Hellenistic Historians Before Josephus,” in *ANRW* II.20 1 (1987): 257, Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 39; Holladay, *Fragments*, 190; Erich S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 87.
8. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean*, 127–28; Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 39; Erkki Koskenniemi, “Greeks, Egyptians and Jews in the Fragments of Artapanus,” *JSP* 13 (2002): 23, provides arguments to rule out an Alexandrian provenance of Artapanus. Kugler suggested that Artapanus wrote in the vicinity of Memphis, because of his “intense interest in Egyptian religious traditions.”; Kugler, “Hearing the Story of Moses in Ptolemaic Egypt,” 69 and there, n. 4 and Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 2:985 (n. 199). Since it is generally believed that Artapanus bears a reference to the Temple of Onias, Hengel has even suggested that Artapanus originated from Leontopolis, cf., Martin Hengel, “Anonymität, Pseudepigraphie und “literarische Fälschung” in der jüdisch-hellenistischen Literatur,” *Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique* 18 (1971): 239. We may argue with Collins (*Between Athens to Jerusalem*, 39 [n. 50]) that nothing in specific ties him to either Alexandria, Memphis, or Leontopolis.
9. Frg. 1 in Eusebius *Praep. Evang.* 9.18.1; Frg. 2 in *Praep. Evang.* 9.23.1-4; Frg. 3 in *Praep. Evang.* 9.27.1-37. The latter fragment is paralleled in the writings of Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 1.23.154.2-3.
10. Frg. 1 renders the title as “Judaica,” but according to frgs. 2.1 and 3.1, the title “Concerning the Jews,” should be given preference as it is also independently confirmed by Clement. Holladay, *Fragments*, 189; Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean*, 128.

citizens, the Heliopolitans.<sup>11</sup> For the convenience of the reader, we will cite the contents of these passages in due course, but we will begin with the most relevant piece for our inquiry, namely the one that contains the information about the building of an allegedly “Jewish” temple in Heliopolis. Thus, in Frg. 2 (23.4) we encounter the following note:

... these people named *Hermiouth* [whom Artapanus identifies as Jews] built both the temple in Athos and the one in Heliopolis.

*Prima facie*, this seems to be evidence for the fact that Jews had built a temple in Heliopolis—apparently also a Jewish one, since should we really assume that Jews would build a pagan shrine; or would they? Indeed, we do not need to look far to find that a Jewish temple, namely that of Onias, existed somewhere in the Heliopolitan nome. The Temple of Onias is mentioned several times by Josephus in his two major historical works, the *Judaean War* and the *Jewish Antiquities* on several occasions and in several contexts (historical and non-historical).<sup>12</sup> The identification of the temple Artapanus is referring to in Heliopolis with the Temple of Onias is thus based on two premises: (1) the temple is a Jewish one (and not pagan) and (2) that this Jewish temple stood in Heliopolis and not anywhere else. However, what are we to make of the fact that Josephus, in some instances, locates the Temple of Onias at a place called Leontopolis?<sup>13</sup>

We shall elucidate this and other problems in the subsequent sections and examine whether or not these premises can be maintained. For that purpose, we will begin with the question if the Temple of Onias was located at Heliopolis or elsewhere.

### *Was the Temple of Onias located in Heliopolis at all?*

The question of the location of the Temple of Onias is a long-standing one, and one that is still much debated. In several passages, Josephus reports about the existence of a Jewish temple in Egypt named the “Temple of Onias” after its founder, a former Jerusalemite high priest called Onias.<sup>14</sup>

While Josephus claims that the Temple of Onias stood *somewhere* in the nome of Heliopolis,<sup>15</sup> he specifies elsewhere (in *Ant.* 13.65, 70) that it was built in a city called Leontopolis, presumably, located in the same nome. Archeological evidence could, of course, solve this puzzle, but despite the fact that the site of the Temple of Onias was

11. These are: Frg. 2 (23.3 and 23.4); Frg. 3 (27.8 and 27.35); see Holladay, *Fragments*, 209–25. See also Barclay’s remark that it “is striking how often Heliopolis features in Artapanus’ story;” Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean*, 128 (and there, n. 5).

12. Alongside some scattered notes in his *Judaean War*, the *Jewish Antiquities* and *Contra Apionem*, Josephus’ main narratives on the Temple of Onias appear in *BJ* 7.421–436 and *Ant.* 13.62–73.

13. See *Jos. BJ* 1.33; 7.426; *Ant.* 12.388; 13.285; 20.236 against *Ant.* 13.65, 70.

14. Because of the contradictory nature of Josephus’ accounts on the history of the temple, there are two candidates for the identity of the temple’s founder: either Onias III or Onias IV, who is said to have been the latter’s son. See on this issue Piotrkowski, *Priests in Exile*, 100–102 and *passim*, who makes a case for Onias III.

15. For the temple’s location in the nome of Heliopolis, see *Jos. BJ* 1.33; 7.426; *Ant.* 12.388; 13.285; 20.236.

earlier identified as *Tell el-Yahoudieh*, this identification has been rightly challenged.<sup>16</sup> One of the graver issues with that identification is that a *Leontopolis* in the *nome of Heliopolis* is, save for Josephus' references in his *Antiquities*, not attested to anywhere else.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, a *Leontopolis* did exist as the capital city of a *nome* of that name, identified today as *Tell Muqdam*.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the connection made by Josephus (or his source) between *Leontopolis* and *Heliopolis* is quite jarring and the datum at *Ant.* 13.65 (and in § 70) hence stands on shaky ground. So, if a *Leontopolis* existed in a different *nome*, did the Temple of Onias really stand there? Did Josephus (or his source) err? Was the temple built in a different location within the *nome* of *Heliopolis*?

In light of the scanty literary evidence and the non-existent archeological evidence to sustain such claim, the answers to these questions remain within the realm of speculation.

The absence of any archeological remains belonging to the Temple of Onias at *Tell el-Yahoudieh* (despite the clear indications that connect the site to Onias)<sup>19</sup> shows that, as some scholars have already noted, the Temple of Onias stood elsewhere. Bohak, for instance, posits that the location of the Temple of Onias was either “inside or, very close to ancient *Heliopolis*.”<sup>20</sup> In light of the above, I concur with Bohak's proposal, but think—and wish to stress—that the Temple of Onias should be sought in only close proximity to *Heliopolis*, namely in its *chora*, instead of in *Heliopolis* proper. We should consider that Onias sought to establish a place of worship that was not completely detached and isolated, but at the same time not too centrally located. That the Temple of Onias should be sought in a location close to *Heliopolis* can be illustrated by a single detail that Josephus provides in *BJ* 7.426, namely the rendered distance of 180 *stadia* (ca. 22.5 Roman miles) between the site and Memphis. Comparable sources provide a distance of 24 Roman miles between Memphis and *Heliopolis*. Since Josephus' source for this detail was a reliable Roman military report, the corresponding distance points to the fact that the Temple of Onias must have been indeed located in *Heliopolis*' vicinity.<sup>21</sup>

16. The most detailed refutation of Petrie's identification is by Gohei Hata, “Where is the Temple Site of Onias IV in Egypt?” in *Flavius Josephus; Interpretation and History* (ed. Jack Pastor et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 177–91. See also Gideon Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth and the Jewish Temple in Heliopolis* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 27–29 and the even earlier reservations of Robert du Mesnil du Buisson, “Compte rendu sommaire d'une mission a Tell el-Yahoudiye,” *BIFAO* 29 (1929): 155–78; Robert du Mesnil du Buisson, “Le Temple d'Onias et le Camp d'Hyksos a Tell el-Yahoudiye,” *BIFAO* 35 (1935): 59–71; and, in particular, Piotrkowski, *Priests in Exile*, 163–68.

17. See also e.g. Ameling, “Die jüdische Gemeinde von Leontopolis,” 117.

18. Carol A. Redmount and Renée F. Friedman, “Tales of a Delta Site: The 1995 Field Season at Tell El-Muqdam,” *JARCE* 34 (1997): 57–83.

19. A funerary epitaph (no. 38 in William Horbury and David Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 90–94; henceforth: *JIGRE*) found in direct proximity to *Tell el-Yahoudieh*, refers to the “Land of Onias” (Ὀνίου γᾶ) which likely implies that Onias ruled a substantial territory and would connect the site with the temple only in a general sense. This means that even though *Tell el-Yahoudieh* may indeed have been an Oniad settlement (i.e., part of the “Land of Onias”), it may not have been the location of the temple.

20. Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth*, 29.

21. On Josephus' sources for his narratives on the Temple of Onias, see Piotrkowski, *Priests in Exile*, 36–65; for his Roman source, see in particular Piotrkowski, *Priests in Exile*, 36–37, 49–53.

With an answer in the affirmative concerning the Heliopolitan location of the Temple of Onias, we will now move on to our next question, namely whether or not the temple at Heliopolis built by the Jews according to Artapanus, was indeed a Jewish temple. If the answer to this question turns out to be affirmative as well, this finding would indeed bolster the assumption that the reference to the Temple of Onias in Artapanus is credible, just as it would provide additional evidence for our dossier of arguments speaking in favor of the assumption that the Temple of Onias was located in Heliopolis and not in Leontopolis as suggested before.

### *The Temple of Heliopolis: Jewish or Pagan?*

We recall that there are several references to Heliopolis and Heliopolitans in Artapanus' extant fragments. In pursuit of our question whether or not they pertain to things Jewish, it seems prudent to scrutinize them one by one in their given contexts and their literary function within the extant text of Artapanus' work. The references essentially fall into two categories: (1) those mentioning Heliopolis (the city) and (2) those mentioning the so-called "Heliopolitans." We will treat these references separately and will begin with the latter category.

*Artapanus' references to the Heliopolitans.* Our first passage appears in Artapanus' largest extant narrative, that on Moses. It relates Moses' exploits in his war against the Ethiopians, an extra-biblical tradition that is also recorded in Josephus.<sup>22</sup> The passage reads as follows:

(7) When Cenephres [the Pharaoh] saw the fame of Moses, he became jealous and sought to kill him on some reasonable pretext. Thus when Ethiopians marched against Egypt, Cenephres, supposing that he had found the right moment, sent Moses against them as the commander of a force of troops. He conscripted a band of farmers for Moses, rashly supposing that Moses would be killed by the enemy because his troops were weak. (8) Moses came to the nome called Hermopolis with approximately 100,000 farmers, and he camped there. He commissioned as generals those who would eventually preside as rulers over the region, and they won every battle with distinction. He [i.e. Artapanus] says that *the Heliopolitans* report that the war lasted ten years. (9) Thus, Moses and those with him, because of the size of [the] army, founded a city in this place, and they consecrated the ibis in the city because of its reputation for killing those animals that were harmful to men. They named it "The City of Hermes."<sup>23</sup>

At first sight, the passage somewhat resembles the story of King David and Uriah the Hittite narrated in 2 Sam 11. Because the king coveted Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, whom David wished to marry, he sent him off to fight at the most dangerous spot during a siege, in order to have him killed. While Uriah could not escape his fate, Moses, in Artapanus' story, did, and prevailed in battle. This passage too, provides the (Gentile?) reader with a foundation story of the city of Hermopolis, an important and thriving border-town during

22. On that tradition see also Jos. *Ant.* 2.239-253 and Tessa Rajak, "Moses in Ethiopia: Legend and Literature," *JJS* 29 (1978): 111-22; Donna Runnalls, "Moses' Ethiopian Campaign," *JSJ* 14 (1983): 135-56.

23. Frg. 3 (27.7-9).

the Hellenistic and Roman period, located between Lower and Upper Egypt.<sup>24</sup> According to this story, it was Moses who founded the city on the foundations of a military camp, that is, a *katoicic* (military settlement) foundation.

It is also tempting to draw here an analogy to the mysterious “Hermiouth,” who are mentioned in Frg. 2 (23.4), the passage we cited at the beginning of this paper, and identified as Jews. Perhaps we may connect the etymology of this sobriquet to the story offered here, that Moses was responsible for the foundation of Hermopolis, the “City of Hermes,” thus linking the Jews directly to him.<sup>25</sup>

Be that as it may, what is more to our concern in this passage is the mention of the so-called “Heliopolitans,” who are cited by Artapanus as a source, or an authority, for the piece of information about the duration of Moses’ campaign against the Ethiopians. This is also their first mention in the extant text of Artapanus. Their sudden appearance in the narrative, void of any previous introduction or further explanation, strikes us as somewhat out of the blue. We encounter them again a bit later in the narrative when Artapanus comes to relate the Jews’ dramatic crossing of the Red Sea, which is the second passage I wish to discuss:

Now the *Memphians* claim that Moses, being familiar with the countryside, watched for the ebb tide, then led the multitudes through the dry part of the sea. The *Heliopolitans* on the other hand, claim that the king rushed down on them with full force, carrying with them all the sacred animals because the Jews were crossing the sea, having taken the possessions of the Egyptians.<sup>26</sup>

Also in this instance, Artapanus cites the authority of the “Heliopolitans” in order to vouch for the veracity of his account, and in good Hellenistic historiographic fashion, he presents his readers with two alternative renditions of a given event in order to support the appearance of the rationality and objectivity of one’s report,<sup>27</sup> and adds a different account by the “Memphians.” As in case of the latter, the identity of the former group too, remains obscure. Moreover, this is also the first (and only) instance in which we hear of the “Memphians” in the extant fragments of Artapanus.

Who were those “Heliopolitans” and “Memphians” whose accounts Artapanus refers to? It is clear from the contents of the narrative that he cites them as his source—or, at least, purports to rely on them. Since these accounts chronicle events pertaining to Jews, it is tempting to assume that they are Jewish in origin. In other words, Artapanus here, cited and contrasted two local Jewish traditions: one of the communities of Memphis and

24. Samy Shenouda, “Hermopolis Magna,” in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Classical Sites* (ed. Richard Stillwell et al.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 389–90.

25. This was also suggested by Holladay, see *Fragments*, 226 (n. 4). Another possibility is that Artapanus, perhaps, had used a source that related that the temples were built by a people called *Hermiouth* (similar to the equally ominous Hyksos) whom he sought to identify with the Jews on purpose in order to give them credit for the erection of these (important) sites of Egyptian worship.

26. Frg. 3 (27.35); the emphases are mine.

27. See e.g., Paul Collomp, “Der Platz des Josephus in der Technik der hellenistischen Geschichtsschreibung,” in *Zur Josephus-Forschung* (ed. Abraham Schalit; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1973), 284–85; Holladay, *Fragments*, 243 (n. 116); Koskenniemi, “Greeks, Egyptians and Jews,” 25; Doran, “Jewish Hellenistic Historians before Josephus,” 262.

one of its Heliopolitan counterpart (which is notably closer to the biblical account in Exod 14 than the more rational account of the Memphians).<sup>28</sup> This, however, does not seem to be the case. Rather, the accounts seem to be of Hellenistic, or Graeco-Egyptian nature.<sup>29</sup>

In support of this assumption, I wish to point to evidence from another prominent Hellenistic author who wrote about Egypt, namely Herodotus. The latter too, cited Memphians (or “Memphites”) and Heliopolitans as authorities, much in the same manner as Artapanus. We shall cite two examples. The first text comes in the context of Herodotus’ description of the phoenix bird that is mythologically connected to Heliopolis<sup>30</sup>:

[1] Another bird is also sacred; it is called the phoenix. I myself have never seen it, but only pictures of it; for the bird comes but seldom into Egypt, once in five hundred years, as *the Heliopolitans* say. [2] It is said that the phoenix comes when his father dies. If the picture truly shows his size and appearance, his plumage is partly golden but mostly red. He is most like an eagle in shape and size.<sup>31</sup>

While this text shows that Herodotus relied on local traditions for his accounts—in the present case, an account he received from the *Heliopolitans*—in another revealing passage, which, like Artapanus, recalls a dispute between the Heliopolitans and the Memphites, he is also more specific about the nature of his sources:

I heard also other things at *Memphis*, in converse with the priests of Hephaestus; and I visited Thebes too and *Heliopolis* for this very purpose, because I desired to know if the priests of those places would tell me the same tale as the priests at *Memphis*; for the *Heliopolitans* are said to be the most learned of the Egyptians.<sup>32</sup>

- 
28. Koskenniemi, “Greeks, Egyptians and Jews,” 25; Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 207. Gruen adds that it is remarkable that Artapanus completely neglects to refer to the law-giving aspect of the story.
29. Artapanus used Egyptian and probably also Jewish traditions, alongside the Septuagint, to form the backbone of his narrative on the biblical patriarchs and of course, as we will see, some Hellenistic sources as well, such as Hecataeus of Abdera, Herodotus, Plutarch and Diodorus Siculus for instance. Holladay, *Fragments*, 192; Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 38–39, 43; Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 128; Ben-Zion Wacholder, *Eupolemus: A Study of Judaeo-Greek Literature* (Hebrew Union College: Cincinnati, 1974), 80; Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 156.
30. On the phoenix and its connection to Heliopolis, see Roelof van den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix: According to Classical and Early Christian Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 1972); Howard Jacobson, *The Exagoge of Ezekiel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 160–61, 219–20; Michael Chyutin, *Tendentious Hagiographies: Jewish Propagandist Fiction BCE* (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 184–86.
31. Herodotus, *Histories*, II 73.1-2: ἔστι δὲ καὶ ἄλλος ὄρνις ἱρός, τῷ οὐνομα φοινῖξ. ἐγὼ μὲν μιν οὐκ εἶδον εἰ μὴ ὅσον γραφῆ. καὶ γὰρ δὴ καὶ σπάνιος ἐπιφοιτᾷ σφι, δι’ ἐτέων, ὡς Ἡλιοπολίται λέγουσι, πεντακοσίων· φοιτᾶν δὲ τότε φασὶ ἐπεάν οἱ ἀποθάνῃ ὁ πατήρ. ἔστι δέ, εἰ τῇ γραφῇ παρόμοιος, τοσούδε καὶ τοιούδε· τὰ μὲν αὐτοῦ χρυσόκομα τῶν πτερῶν τὰ δὲ ἐρυθρὰ ἐς τὰ μάλιστα· αἰετῶ περιήγησιν. The translation derives from Alfred D. Godley, *Herodotus (LCL)*, 4 vols.; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920), 1:359–61 with a slight emendation by the author. The emphases are mine, too.
32. Herodotus, II 3.1: κατὰ μὲν δὴ τὴν τροφήν τῶν παίδων τοσαῦτα ἔλεγον, ἤκουσα δὲ καὶ ἄλλα ἐν Μέμφι ἐλθὼν ἐς λόγους τοῖσι ἱρεῦσι τοῦ Ἡφαίστου. καὶ δὴ καὶ ἐς Θήβας τε καὶ ἐς Ἡλίου πόλιν

From this passage, we learn that Herodotus' source for his accounts about Memphis, Heliopolis, and Thebes in Book II of his *Histories*, were local (Egyptian!) priests. In that particular book, that is, Book II, they are often quoted as the ultimate authority, especially on questions of religion, culture, and geography.<sup>33</sup> However, Herodotus also utilized these citations in an opposite function, namely to insinuate doubts or reservations about certain accounts for which he avoids responsibility and about which he himself seems skeptical; especially seemingly marvelous (and "implausible") reports, such as the one about the phoenix-bird we have just cited.<sup>34</sup> Again, by the time that Artapanus wrote, this had already become a popular standard operational practice in Hellenistic historiography.

Returning to Artapanus and the question of the identity of those Memphians and Heliopolitans whose traditions he cites, we make two observations. The first is that the reliance on Memphite and Heliopolitan traditions is something that can be found already in Herodotus, and something which Artapanus appears to have imitated. Second, we note that these traditions are not Jewish, but Egyptian—or at least, they purport to be. It becomes apparent that Artapanus, in similar fashion to Herodotus, cites these "foreign" traditions for the purpose of vouchsafing for the historicity of the biblical events he narrates. In brackets, let us add to this the example of Josephus, who cites, in his *Contra Apionem*, Egyptian accounts as proof of the events of the Exodus, or, for that matter, other important events in Jewish history.<sup>35</sup>

The Herodotan example allows us to speculate further whether the Memphite and Heliopolitan traditions cited by Artapanus are local native-Egyptian priestly traditions as well. A hint to bolster that assumption seems to be provided by a note in Frg. 3 (27.30) that comes in the context of the magical standoff between Moses and Pharaoh's magicians in the royal palace at Memphis. Here, Artapanus offers the following account:

(30) When this had been done, the king summoned the *priests who were over Memphis* and threatened to kill them and destroy their temples unless they too performed some marvellous act. Then, using charms and incantations, they made a serpent and changed the color of the river.

This passage makes explicit the involvement of Memphite Egyptian priests in the events leading up and surrounding the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt as told by Artapanus. It follows that a little later in the narrative (in Frg. 3 [27.35]), when he comes to narrate the

---

αὐτῶν τούτων εἶνεκεν ἐτραπόμην, ἐθέλων εἰδέναι εἰ συμβήσονται τοῖσι λόγοισι τοῖσι ἐν Μέμφι: οἱ γὰρ Ἡλιοπολίται λέγονται Αἰγυπτίων εἶναι λογιώτατοι. The translation follows Godley, *Herodotus*, 1:277 with a slight emendation by the author; emphases are mine.

33. David Asheri, Alan Lloyd and Aldo Corcella, *A Commentary on Herodotus: Books I-IV* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 20.

34. Asheri et al., *A Commentary on Herodotus*, 20.

35. See e.g. Jos. C. *Ap.* 2.15-17. Concerning Josephus' *Contra Apionem*, see Aryeh Kasher, "Polemic and Apologetic Methods of Writing in *Contra Apionem*," in *Josephus' Contra Apionem. Studies in its Character and Context with a Latin Concordance to the Portion Missing in Greek* (ed. Louis H. Feldman and John R. Levinson; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 143-86 and Jan-Willem van Henten and Ra'anan Abusch, "The Depiction of the Jews as Typhonians and Josephus' Strategy of Refutation in *Contra Apionem*," in *Josephus' Contra Apionem. Studies in its Character and Context with a Latin Concordance to the Portion Missing in Greek* (ed. Louis H. Feldman and John R. Levinson; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 272-309.

Jews' dramatic crossing of the Red Sea, the "Memphian" version of the events, namely that Moses simply waited for the ebb-tide to be able to cross the sea, instead of having split the sea with his rod with a little bit of divine assistance (as Jewish tradition has it), is the version of those priests from Memphis who faced Moses in the palace beforehand. Together with that, we also note that the "Memphian" version denies Moses any supernatural abilities. It thus seems hostile toward the Jews attempting to escape to safety, which is what we would expect from a non-Jewish source rather than a Jewish one.

To conclude this section of our inquiry, we have seen that in those instances in which Artapanus refers to Memphis/Memphites and Heliopolis/Heliopolitans, he not only apes Herodotus, but he also conveys to his readers that the sources he used are non-Jewish, local Egyptian (priestly) ones. With this in mind, we now turn to his other references to Heliopolis in order to see whether also in these instances Artapanus refers to non-Jewish contexts.

*Artapanus' references to Heliopolis (the City).* Before we take a closer look at Artapanus' references to the city of Heliopolis, it seems worthwhile to provide some background on the location. The ancient city of Heliopolis was known by the Egyptians as *Iunu*, from the transliteration *īwnw*, meaning "(Place of) Pillars." It was located on the Pelusiac branch of the Nile, which connected with the road northward to Judaea at Pelusium (today's *Tell Hīsn*). In the Bible, the place is called *Ōn* (ןא) or *Āwen* (ןא), Greek: Ὀν. The Egyptian god Atum-Ra, was the chief deity of the city. He was worshipped in the primary temple, known as *Per-Aat*, or *Per-Atum* (that is, "House of Atum," Hebrew: פתם *Pithom* [Ex. 1:11]).<sup>36</sup> In the Hellenistic period, Heliopolis became the capital of the 13th nome of Lower Egypt. The city flourished as a major center of learning in that period and housed renowned schools of philosophy and astronomy. The later Ptolemies seem to have taken little interest in the cult of Atum-Ra and the city as a whole, clearly preferring Alexandria, which had outdone it as a major center of science and learning.<sup>37</sup> Thus, with the withdrawal of royal favor, Heliopolis quickly declined. In fact, by the first century BCE Strabo found the temples deserted and the town itself almost uninhabited, although priests were still present there.<sup>38</sup>

However, at the time when Artapanus composed his narratives, sometime in the second century BCE, there still existed a general fascination with Heliopolis that was shared by some of his predecessors and contemporary Greek and Roman authors.<sup>39</sup> Whether or not

36. See also Byron E. Shafer, ed., *Temples of Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 9–10, 32, 36.

37. James P. Allen, "Heliopolis," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* (ed. Donald B. Redford; Vol. 2; Oxford: Oxford University Press; Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2001), 88–89; John Baines and Jaromir Málek, *Atlas of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1983), 173–74; Donald B. Redford, "Heliopolis," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ed. David N. Freedman; 6 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:122–23; Richard H. Wilkinson, *The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt* (Cairo: The American University of Cairo Press, 2005), 111–12; Delcor, "Le Temple d'Onias," 201–202; Samuel A. Hirsch, "The Temple of Onias," in *Jews' College Jubilee Volume* (London: Luzac & Co., 1906), 57; Joan E. Taylor, "A Second Temple in Egypt: The Evidence for the Zadokite Temple of Onias," *JSJ* 29 (1998): 314–15.

38. Strabo, *Geography*, 17.1.27.

39. Herodotus, *Histories*, II 3, 7, 59. For the fascination of Heliopolis in Hellenistic literature, see Taylor, "A Second Temple in Egypt," 314 and, e.g., Ptolemy, 4. 5.54; Strabo, *Geography*,

this fascination with the location was triggered by Herodotus' testimony remains moot. But, as noted, also in the Jewish tradition, Heliopolis is a place of interest. We recall that, according to LXX Exodus 1:11, *ON* is identified with Heliopolis and it is listed there as one of the three cities rebuilt by the Israelites.<sup>40</sup> It is said to have been the home of Aseneth, Joseph's wife, the daughter of Potipherah, the priest of *ON*.<sup>41</sup> In this context, and obviously using the Bible as his source, Artapanus has the following to say in our first text we cite here, which is also the same text we cited at the beginning of our inquiry:

He [i.e. Joseph] married Aseneth,<sup>42</sup> the daughter of a priest of *Heliopolis*, by whom he fathered children.<sup>43</sup> Later, both his father and brothers came to him, bringing with them many possessions. They settled in *Heliopolis* and *Sais*, and the Syrians multiplied in Egypt. He [i.e. Artapanus] says that these people named *Hermiouth*<sup>44</sup> built both the temple in Athos<sup>45</sup> and the one in *Heliopolis*. (Frg. 2 [23.3–4])

The report is, as noted, obviously based on the biblical account in Genesis with a plus of the enigmatic note on the temple-building in Heliopolis, which, of course, has no biblical precedent. What emerges from this passage is that a people designated as “Hermiouth,” who are to be identified as Jews, had, in fact, built *two* temples in Egypt—one in Heliopolis, the other in a place called Athos. In contrast to the former, nothing is known about the latter's location, just as nothing is specified here about the nature of those temples, that is, whether they were native Egyptian or Jewish. Artapanus seems to assume that his readers—Jewish

---

17.1.; Diodorus Siculus, 1.84.57; Arrian, *Exp. Alex.*, 3.1; Aelian, *H. A.*, 6.58, 12.7; Plutarch, *Solon*, 26; *De Is. et Osir.*, 33; Diogenes Laertius, 18. 8. § 6; Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, 3.21; Pliny the Elder, 5. 9.11; Tacitus, *Ann.*, 6.28; Pomponius Mela, 3.8. See also Willrich, who noted that Heliopolis was considered the oldest and most prominent abode of Egyptian wisdom. He also claimed that a “study trip” to Heliopolis certainly behoved any good Greek intellectual at the time. See Hugo Willrich, *Juden und Griechen vor der makkabäischen Erhebung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895), 168.

40. LXX Exod 1:11: “καὶ ἐπέστησεν αὐτοῖς ἐπιστάτας τῶν ἔργων ἵνα κακώσωσιν αὐτοὺς ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις καὶ ὠκοδόμησαν πόλεις ὀχυράς τῷ Φαραῶ τὴν τε Πιθῶμ καὶ Ραμεσση καὶ Ὠν ἣ ἐστὶν Ἡλίου πόλις. (And he set over them overseers of tasks in order to afflict them in the tasks. And they built fortified cities for Pharaoh, both Pithom and Ramesses and *On*, which is *Heliopolis* [translation: NETS]);” emphases are mine.

41. Gen 41:45, 50, 46:20 and see also *Joseph & Aseneth* 1-3; Jos. *Ant.* 2.188. Josephus also preserved some legends connecting Moses with Heliopolis: *C. Ap.* 1.238, 250, 279; 2.10-11, 13.

42. Gen 41:45, 50.

43. Compare e.g. Jos. *Ant.* 2.91-92; *Joseph & Aseneth* 1-3. The reference to their children is to Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen 41:50-52). Frey identifies this passage as an attempt to predate, and thus legitimize, Jewish presence in the district of Heliopolis, and even the presence of a Jewish sanctuary within the context of ancient Egyptian temples. Frey, “Temple and Rival Temple,” 187. While we concede that the passage certainly attempts to project Jewish presence in Egypt into the remote past in order to legitimize their presence in the country, we need to emend his statement regarding the Temple of Onias; see below.

44. See above, Note 25.

45. This location is otherwise unknown, see also Holladay, *Fragments*, 230 (n. 27). The closest parallel I managed to trace, is a place by the name of Psabathos (Ψαβαθως) near Krokodilopolis in the Arsinoite nome (Fâyum), mentioned in a papyrus, dated 6 CE (*SB* 18 13885).

and/or non-Jewish—would know to which temples he refers; we, as modern readers, less so. Since modern scholars, much as ancient Jews and non-Jews,<sup>46</sup> were aware of the existence of the Temple of Onias, the combination of Jews building a temple in Heliopolis was quickly interpreted as possible evidence for the building of the Oniad edifice.<sup>47</sup>

While we could comfortably live with the notion that Artapanus tells us about the building of a Jewish temple in Heliopolis (the Temple of Onias?), it strikes us as curious, at the same time, that he also tells about the building of another temple. Are we to assume that this other temple at Athos was Jewish too? As noted, we know nothing of a Jewish temple, or any other temple for that matter, at a place called “Athos,” let alone of the existence of a Jewish community there.<sup>48</sup> This raises suspicions about the Jewish nature of the shrine at Athos, much as it does about the alleged Jewishness of the Heliopolitan sanctuary.

So, while Artapanus brings the piece of information about the temple-building in a Jewish context, and there is other evidence for the existence of a Jewish shrine at Heliopolis, it is also known that there was another, perhaps even better-known temple at Heliopolis: The Temple of Atum-Ra. We should not forget that Heliopolis was a major and important center of Egyptian worship and culture. In light of this, it seems that Artapanus’ reference to the building of a temple at Heliopolis does not refer to the Jewish Temple of Onias, but rather to the well-known pagan Egyptian Temple of Atum-Ra.

This notion is lent support by another passage later in the narrative. Now having reached the life of Moses, Artapanus, by way of introduction, provides some background for his readers before jumping straight to Moses and the events of his life. In this second text that refers to Heliopolis, in Frg. 3 (27.2), Artapanus states the following:

First he (i.e. the Pharaoh Palmanothes) built *Sais*, then he set up the temple there. Later he built the sanctuary in *Heliopolis*.

This note reiterates and builds upon Artapanus’ previous statement in Frg. 2 (23.3–4) from the days of Joseph, where we heard that the latter’s father and brothers came to

46. Bohak has argued that an Egyptian papyrus (*CPJ* III, 520) polemizes against the Temple of Onias and its community; see Gideon Bohak, “*CPJ* III, 520: The Egyptian Reaction to Onias’ Temple,” *JSJ* 36 (1995): 32–41. If Bohak is correct in his assumptions, then the papyrus clearly indicates that the Temple of Onias was a known institution in Egypt and recognized as such by the Egyptian native population. This likewise implies that the Hellenistic population settling in Egypt was also aware of the existence of the temple, more so if we recall that – based on the assumed mixed nature of the Leontopolitan cemetery – Hellenistic mercenaries most probably fought and lived alongside the members of the Oniad community. On the notion that the Oniad cemetery of Leontopolis was mixed, see Gideon Bohak, “Good Jews, Bad Jews and Non-Jews in Greek Papyri and Inscriptions,” in *Akten des 21. Internationalen Papyrologenkongresses, Berlin 13–19.8.1995* (ed. Bärbel Kramer et al.; Stuttgart: Teubner, 1997), 105–12 and Tal Ilan, “The New Jewish Inscriptions from Hierapolis and the Question of Jewish Diaspora Cemeteries,” *SCI* 25 (2006): 71–86.

47. See our Note 3, above.

48. See Koskenniemi, “Greeks, Egyptians and Jews,” 26–27. Holladay conjectured that, if the reference to Heliopolis really denotes the Temple of Onias here, is the reference to Athos, by analogy, a reference to the Temple of Onias’ predecessor, the Jewish Temple at Elephantine? See Holladay, *Fragments*, 230 (n. 28).

Egypt and settled in Heliopolis and Saïs. But we also learn from this text in Frg. 3 another important fact, namely that the sanctuary which the Jews had built in Heliopolis in Frg. 2, was commissioned by Pharaoh (!)—and so was, we must assume, the temple of Athos, which is passed over by Artapanus in this instance. Since it makes little sense that Pharaoh would commission the building of a Jewish temple, it follows that the temple at Heliopolis was not a Jewish, but a pagan Egyptian shrine. Thus, all that Artapanus wishes to stress here is that the construction of the temple at Heliopolis was executed by Jews. In other words, Artapanus wished to underscore that, among other useful and beneficial things the Jews had taught and done for the Egyptians, they were also responsible for building the famous Temple of Atum-Ra in Heliopolis.

In support of our observation that Artapanus accredits the Jews with founding and settling important cities in Egypt, teaching the Egyptians sciences, and building their temples, I wish to draw attention to an account by Zenon of Rhodes,<sup>49</sup> which is cited by Diodorus Siculus in his *Bibliotheca Historica* 5.57:

5.57 <sup>1</sup> The Heliadae, besides having shown themselves superior to all other men, likewise surpassed them in learning and especially in astrology; and they introduced many new practices in seamanship and established the division of the day into hours. <sup>2</sup> The most highly endowed of them by nature was Tenages, who was slain by his brothers because of their envy of him; but when their treacherous act became known, all who had had a hand in the murder took to flight. Of their number Macar came to Lesbos, and Candalus to Cos; and Actis, sailing off to Egypt, founded there the city men call *Heliopolis*, naming it after his father; and it was from him that the Egyptians learned the laws of astrology. <sup>3</sup> But when at a later time there came a flood among the Greeks and the majority of mankind perished by reason of the abundance of rain, it came to pass that all written monuments were also destroyed in the same manner as mankind; <sup>4</sup> and this is the reason why the Egyptians, seizing the favourable occasion, appropriated to themselves the knowledge of astrology, and why, since the Greeks, because of their ignorance, no longer laid any claim to writing, the belief prevailed that the Egyptians were the first men to effect the discovery of the stars. <sup>5</sup> Likewise the Athenians, although they were the founders of the city in Egypt men call *Saïs*, suffered from the same ignorance because of the flood . . . <sup>50</sup>

49. Zeno of Rhodes (born not later than 220 BCE) was a Rhodian politician and historian. He wrote a now lost history of Rhodes in (perhaps) fifteen books (FGrH523). However, his work has only partly survived in fragments that were cited by later ancient authors, mainly by Polybius, but also by Diodorus, who relied on his work for his account of Rhodian “prehistory” (5.55–59) and the siege of Rhodes by Demetrius I Poliorketes (20.81–88; 91–100). On Zenon of Rhodes, see Hans-Ulrich Wiemer, “Zeno of Rhodes,” in *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History* (ed. Roger S. Bagnall et al.; Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 7168; and Hans-Ulrich Wiemer, “Zeno of Rhodes and the Rhodian View of the Past,” in *Polybius and His World: Essays in Memory of F.W. Walbank* (ed. Bruce Gibson and Thomas Harrison; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 279–306.

50. Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History, Books 4.59-8*; transl. and ed. Charles H. Oldfather (Vol. III; *LCL*; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939), 252–54. οἱ δ' Ἡλιάδαι διάφοροι γενηθέντες τῶν ἄλλων ἐν παιδείᾳ διήνεγκαν καὶ μάλιστα ἐν ἀστρολογίᾳ. εἰσηγήσαντο δὲ καὶ περὶ τῆς ναυτιλίας πολλὰ καὶ τὰ περὶ τὰς ὥρας διέταξαν. [2] εὐφρέστατος δὲ γενόμενος Τενάγης ὑπὸ τῶν ἀδελφῶν διὰ φθόνον ἀνηρέθη: γνωσθείσης δὲ τῆς ἐπιβουλῆς οἱ μετασχόντες τοῦ φόνου πάντες ἔφυγον. τούτων δὲ Μάκαρ μὲν εἰς Λέσβον ἀφίκετο, Κάνδαλος δὲ εἰς τὴν Κῶ: ἀκτίς δ' εἰς Αἴγυπτον ἀπάρας ἔκτισε τὴν Ἡλιούπολιν ὀνομαζομένην, ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς θέμενος τὴν

Judging from the contents of the text, some of its details sound strikingly similar to what Artapanus tells us about the life and achievements of the Jewish patriarchs. In fact, the contents of both Zenon and Artapanus are so similar that one may argue for a literary dependence. However, neither is it clear when Artapanus lived and wrote his work “*Concerning the Jews*,” nor can we claim the same about Zeno with certainty.<sup>51</sup> Thus, this question must remain moot.

Be that as it may, according to Zeno *apud* Diodorus, it was, in fact, one of the Rhodian Heliades, a certain Aktis, who had founded Heliopolis in honor of his father. The Athenians, on the other hand, are said to have founded the city of Sais, but not the Jews. The Rhodians also taught the Egyptians astrology (5.57.1, 4); Artapanus claims the same about Abraham (Frg. 1.1.6).<sup>52</sup> Then, Zenon relates the fate of a certain Tenages, who was envied by his brothers on account of his skills and murdered by them (5.57.2). This of course is reminiscent of Joseph’s story, whose brothers also plotted against him, as the Bible (Gen 37) and Artapanus tell us (Frg. 2 [23.1]).

It is not my intent here to discuss which report came first and who copied it from whom, or whether or not there is a (textual) relationship between Zenon and Artapanus at all. What this example goes to show is that “foreigners” competed to lay claim on Egyptian accomplishments in order to aggrandize their own people *viz-à-viz* the Egyptians. It is this, apologetic, context in which we have to read and understand Artapanus’ references to Heliopolis and the Heliopolitans. Collins labeled Artapanus “one of the most striking examples of ‘competitive historiography’ which has survived from the Egyptian Diaspora” and in my opinion, this claim has much to recommend it, including one more item than usually recognized.<sup>53</sup>

---

προσηγορίαν: οἱ δ’ Αἰγύπτιοι ἔμαθον παρ’ αὐτοῦ τὰ περὶ τὴν ἀστρολογίαν θεωρήματα. [3] ὕστερον δὲ παρὰ τοῖς Ἑλλήσι γενομένου κατακλισμοῦ, καὶ διὰ τὴν ἐπομβρίαν τῶν πλείστων ἀνθρώπων ἀπολομένων, ὁμοίως τούτοις καὶ τὰ διὰ τῶν γραμμάτων ὑπομνήματα συνέβη φθαρῆναι: [4] δι’ ἣν αἰτίαν οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι καιρὸν εὐθετον λαβόντες ἐξιδιοποίησαντο τὰ περὶ τῆς ἀστρολογίας, καὶ τῶν Ἑλλήνων διὰ τὴν ἄγνοιαν μηκέτι τῶν γραμμάτων ἀντιπιοιούμενων ἐνίσχυσεν, ὡς αὐτοὶ πρῶτοι τὴν τῶν ἀστρων εὐρεσιν ἐποίησαντο. [5] ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ Ἀθηναῖοι κτίσαντες ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ πόλιν τὴν ὀνομαζομένην Σάιν, τῆς ὁμοίας ἔτυχον ἀγνοίας διὰ τὸν κατακλισμὸν.

51. Regarding Zeno, see n. 49 above. As noted, the precise dates of Artapanus *floruit* remain debatable; on this issue see our n. 5, above.
52. See also Willrich, *Juden und Griechen*, 169. Note in a similar vein, the efforts of the Samaritan Pseudo-Eupolemus to accredit Abraham passing over of the science of astronomy to the Egyptian priests of Heliopolis (*Praep. Evan.* 9.17.3-4). The author, here, hardly refers to the Temple of Onias; rather, we may imagine that – somewhat in a similar manner as the member of the Oniad community – the Samaritan author sought to aggrandize the role of his forefathers and his temple. We encounter similar efforts narrated by Josephus, see e.g. *Ant.* 13.74-79. On the latter episode see Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 240–43. On Pseudo-Eupolemus see Willrich, *Juden und Griechen*, 157–161.; Ben-Zion Wacholder, “Pseudo-Eupolemus’ Two Greek Fragments on the Life of Abraham,” *HUCA* 34 (1963): 81–113; Holladay, *Fragments*, 157–87. On the motif of the Jewish forefathers (i.e. Abraham and Moses) teaching Egyptians and Greeks science (and in particular astronomy and astrology), see Pieter Willem van der Horst, “Schriftgebruik bij drie vroege joods-hellenistische Historici: Demetrius, Artapanus, Eupolemus,” *Amsterdamse Cahiers voor Exegese en Bijbelse Theologie* 6 (1985): 149, 156.
53. Collins, *Between Athens to Jerusalem*, 46. On the term “competitive historiography,” which was coined by Collins, see *Between Athens to Jerusalem*, 39–40.

## Conclusion

As I hope to have shown, a closer look at Artapanus' references to Heliopolis and the Heliopolitans that are embedded in his narratives about the Jewish patriarchs should be understood against the backdrop of his efforts to relate major Egyptian cultural and religious achievements to a Jewish origin. Accordingly, throughout his writings, he mentions discoveries such as astrology,<sup>54</sup> philosophy, measurements and many other useful things introduced to the Egyptians by the Jews, including the jarring note on the introduction of animal worship by Moses.<sup>55</sup>

Into this category too, falls Artapanus' note in Frg. 2 (23.4) that Jews had built a temple in Heliopolis. But it was not the Jewish Temple of Onias that Artapanus had in mind when putting down this note to parchment (or papyrus), but the famed native Egyptian Temple of Atum-Ra at Heliopolis. It is tempting to suggest that Artapanus, in doing so, intended to combat and "score off" anti-Jewish Egyptian traditions and writers in the likes of Manetho.<sup>56</sup> The latter, himself a priest from Heliopolis, claimed that the Jews were a leprous people that were expelled from Egypt because they revolted against the Egyptians. The Jews' leader, Moses, according to Manetho, was a certain priest from Heliopolis called Osarsiph.<sup>57</sup> What better answer to give than claiming that not only Heliopolis itself was a Jewish foundation, but also the very shrine at which Manetho seems to have served was built by Jews. Certainly, this would be something we would designate as competitive historiography.<sup>58</sup>

Although this inquiry has yielded a negative result with respect to the question whether or not Artapanus can be considered a source for the existence of the Jewish Temple of Onias at Heliopolis, I hope to have shed some light on Artapanus' intentions as a historian, the use and reworking of his sources, and his way of presenting the history of the Jews in the Egyptian Diaspora of which he was part.

- 
54. Astrology and astronomy belonged to the most revered ancient sciences and the claim that it was the Jews who invented it and passed it on to other nations was a bold one and obviously designed to convey the supremacy of the Jews over other nations and to boast their self-esteem and national pride. See our Note 52, above.
55. Kugler, "Hearing the Story of Moses in Ptolemaic Egypt," 69; Koskenniemi, "Greeks, Egyptians and Jews," 26; Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 158. Gruen also remarks that the references to animal worship were introduced to amuse the audience and that he willfully toyed with those traditions, cf. Gruen, *Diaspora*, 209; see also Doran, "Jewish Hellenistic Historians," 259–63.
56. Manetho was a native Egyptian priest from Heliopolis who lived sometime in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. He wrote the *Aegyptiaca* (*History of Egypt*) in Greek, which is considered one of the major chronological sources for the reigns of the pharaohs of ancient Egypt. It is unclear if he wrote his work during the reign of Ptolemy I Soter or Ptolemy II Philadelphos, but no later than that of Ptolemy III Euergetes. On Manetho see in particular, Russell E. Gmirkin, *Berosus and Genesis, Manetho and Exodus. Hellenistic Histories and the Date of the Pentateuch* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006).
57. Jos. C. Ap. 1.250 and Willrich, *Juden und Griechen*, 169–70. Regarding the discussion whether this passage is the genuine Manetho, or Pseudo-Manetho, see Miriam Pucci ben Zeev, "The Reliability of Josephus Flavius: The Case of Hecataeus' and Manetho's Accounts of Jews and Judaism: Fifteen Years of Contemporary Research (1974–1990)," *JSJ* 24 (1993): 215–34.
58. Collins, "Artapanus Revisited," 63.

### Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Bibliography

- Allen, James P. "Heliopolis." Pages 88–89 in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*. Vol. 2. Edited by Donald B. Redford. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2001.
- Ameling, Walter. "Die jüdische Gemeinde von Leontopolis nach den Inschriften." Pages 117–33 in *Die Septuaginta: Texte, Kontexte, Lebenswelten*. Edited by Martin Karrer et al. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008.
- Asheri, David, Alan Lloyd and Aldo Corcella. *A Commentary on Herodotus: Books I-IV*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Baines, John and Jaromir Málek. *Atlas of Ancient Egypt*. Oxford: Phaidon, 1983.
- Barclay, John M. *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
- Bohak, Gideon. "CPJ III, 520: The Egyptian Reaction to Onias' Temple." *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 36 (1995): 32–41.
- Bohak, Gideon. *Joseph and Aseneth and the Jewish Temple in Heliopolis*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996.
- Bohak, Gideon. "Good Jews, Bad Jews and Non-Jews in Greek Papyri and Inscriptions." Pages 105–12 in *Akten des 21. Internationalen Papyrologenkongresses, Berlin 13–19.8.1995*. Edited by Bärbel Kramer et al. Stuttgart: Teubner, 1997.
- Chyutin, Michael. *Tendentious Hagiographies: Jewish Propagandist Fiction BCE*. London: T & T Clark, 2011.
- Collins, John J. "Artapanus." Pages 889–95 in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. Vol. 2. Edited by James H. Charlesworth. Garden City: Doubleday, 1985.
- Collins, John J. *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000.
- Collins, John J. "Artapanus Revisited." Pages 59–68 in *From Judaism to Christianity: Tradition and Transition. A Festschrift for Thomas H. Tobin, S.J., on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*. Edited by Patricia Walters. Leiden: Brill, 2010.
- Collomp, Paul. "Der Platz des Josephus in der Technik der hellenistischen Geschichtsschreibung." Pages 278–93 in *Zur Josephus-Forschung*. Edited by Abraham Schalit. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1973.
- Delcor, Martin. "Le temple d'Onias en Égypte." *Revue Biblique* 75 (1968): 188–205.
- Doran, Robert. "The Jewish Hellenistic Historians Before Josephus." in *ANRW II.20 1* (1987): 246–97.
- du Mesnil du Buisson, Robert. "Compte rendu sommaire d'une mission a Tell el-Yahoudiye." *Bulletin d'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale* 29 (1929): 155–78.
- du Mesnil du Buisson, Robert. "Le temple d'Onias et le Camp d'Hyksos a Tell el-Yahoudiye." *Bulletin d'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale* 35 (1935): 59–71.
- Flusser, David and Shua Amorai-Stark. "The Goddess Thermuthis, Moses and Artapanus." *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 1 (1993–1994): 217–33.
- Fraser, Peter M. *Ptolemaic Alexandria*. 3 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972.

- Frey, Jörg. "Temple and Rival Temple—the Cases of Elephantine, Mt. Gerizim, and Leontopolis." Pages 171–203 in *Gemeinde ohne Tempel: Zur Substituierung und Transformation des Jerusalemer Tempels und seines Kultes im Alten Testament, antiken Judentum und frühen Christentum*. Edited by Beate Ego et al. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999.
- Gmirkin, Russell E. *Berossus and Genesis, Manetho and Exodus. Hellenistic Histories and the Date of the Pentateuch*. New York: T & T Clark, 2006.
- Godley, Alfred D. *Herodotus. LCL*. 4 vols. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920.
- Gruen, Erich S. *Heritage and Hellenism. The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Gruen, Erich S. *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Hata, Gohei. "Where is the Temple Site of Onias IV in Egypt?" Pages 177–91 in *Flavius Josephus: Interpretation and History*. Edited by Jack Pastor et al. Leiden: Brill, 2011.
- Hengel, Martin. "Anonymität, Pseudepigraphie und "literarische Fälschung" in der jüdisch-hellenistischen Literatur." *Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique* 18 (1971): 231–308.
- Hirsch, Samuel A. "The Temple of Onias." Pages 39–80 in *Jews' College Jubilee Volume*. Edited by Jews' College. London: Luzac, 1906.
- Holladay, Carl R. *Theios Aner in Hellenistic Judaism: A Critique of the Use of This Category in New Testament Christology*. Diss. Series SBL 40. Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977.
- Holladay, Carl R. *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors: Volume 1: Historians*. SBL. Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1983.
- Horbury, William and David Noy. *Jewish Inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Ilan, Tal. "The New Jewish Inscriptions from Hierapolis and the Question of Jewish Diaspora Cemeteries." *Scripta Classica Israelica* 25 (2006): 71–86.
- Jacobson, Howard. *The Exagoge of Ezekiel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Jacobson, Howard. "Artapanus Judaeus." *Journal of Jewish Studies* 57 (2006): 210–21.
- Johnson, Sara R. *Historical Fictions and Hellenistic Jewish Identities: Third Maccabees in Its Cultural Context*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
- Kasher, Aryeh. "Polemic and Apologetic Methods of Writing in *Contra Apionem*." Pages 143–86 in *Josephus' Contra Apionem. Studies in its Character and Context with a Latin Concordance to the Portion Missing in Greek*. Edited by Louis H. Feldman and John R. Levinson. Leiden: Brill, 1996.
- Koskenniemi, Erkki. "Greeks, Egyptians and Jews in the Fragments of Artapanus." *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 13 (2002): 17–31.
- Kugler, Rob. "Hearing the Story of Moses in Ptolemaic Egypt: Artapanus Accommodates the Traditions." Pages 67–80 in *The Wisdom of Egypt. Jewish, Early Christian, and Gnostic Essays in Honour of Gerard P. Luttikhuisen*. Edited by Anthony Hillhorst and George H. v. Kooten. Leiden: Brill, 2005.
- Oldfather, Charles H., translated and ed. *Diodorus Siculus, Library of History, Books 4.59-8. Vol. III (LCL)*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939).
- Piotrkowski, Meron M. *Priests in Exile: The History of the Temple of Onias and Its Community in the Hellenistic Period*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2019.
- Pucci ben Zeev, Miriam. "The Reliability of Josephus Flavius: The Case of Hecataeus' and Manetho's Accounts of Jews and Judaism: Fifteen Years of Contemporary Research (1974–1990)." *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 24 (1993): 215–34.
- Rajak, Tessa. "Moses in Ethiopia: Legend and Literature." *Journal of Jewish Studies* 29 (1978): 111–22.
- Redford, Donald B. "Heliopolis." Pages 122–23 in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Vol. 3. Edited by David N. Freedman. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

- Redmount, Carol A. and Renee F. Friedman. "Tales of a Delta Site: The 1995 Field Season at Tell El-Muqdam." *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 34 (1997): 57–83.
- Rigsby, Kent J. "A Jewish Asylum in Graeco-Roman Egypt." Pages 127–41 in *Das Antike Asyl [The Ancient Asylum]*. Edited by Martin Dreher. Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2003.
- Runnalls, Donna. "Moses' Ethiopian Campaign." *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 14 (1983): 135–56.
- Shafer, Byron E., ed. *Temples of Ancient Egypt*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.
- Shenouda, Samy. "Hermopolis Magna." Pages 389–90 in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Classical Sites*. Edited by Richard Stillwell et al. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976.
- Smallwood, E. Mary. *The Jews under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian. A Study in Political Relations*. Leiden: Brill, 1976.
- Taylor, Joan E. "A Second Temple in Egypt: The Evidence for the Zadokite Temple of Onias." *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 29 (1998): 297–321.
- Tcherikover, Victor. *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*. New York: JPS, 1959.
- van Henten, Jan-Willem, and Ra'anan Abusch. "The Depiction of the Jews as Typhonians and Josephus' Strategy of Refutation in *Contra Apionem*." Pages 272–309 in *Josephus' Contra Apionem. Studies in its Character and Context with a Latin Concordance to the Portion Missing in Greek*. Edited by Louis H. Feldman and John R. Levinson. Leiden: Brill, 1996.
- van den Broek, Roelof. *The Myth of the Phoenix: According to Classical and Early Christian Traditions*. Leiden: Brill, 1972.
- van der Horst, Pieter Willem. "Schriftgebruik bij drie vroege joods-hellenistische Historici: Demetrius, Artapanus, Eupolemus." *Amsterdamse Cahiers voor Exegese en Bijbelse Theologie* 6 (1985): 144–61.
- Wacholder, Ben-Zion. *Eupolemus. A Study of Judaeo-Greek Literature*. Hebrew Union College: Cincinnati, 1974.
- Wacholder, Ben-Zion. "Pseudo-Eupolemus' Two Greek Fragments on the Life of Abraham." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 34 (1963): 81–113.
- Wiemer, Hans-Ulrich. "Zeno of Rhodes." Page 7168 in *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*. Edited by Roger S. Bagnall et al. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.
- Wiemer, Hans-Ulrich. "Zeno of Rhodes and the Rhodian View of the Past." Pages 279–306 in *Polybius and His World: Essays in Memory of F.W. Walbank*. Edited by Bruce Gibson and Thomas Harrison. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Wilkinson, Richard H. *The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt*. Cairo: The American University of Cairo Press, 2005.
- Willrich, Hugo. *Juden und Griechen vor der makkabäischen Erhebung*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895.
- Zellentin, Holger. "The End of Jewish Egypt: Artapanus and the Second Exodus." Pages 27–73 in *Antiquity in Antiquity*. Edited by Kevin Osterloh and Gregg Gardner. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008.

### Author biography

Meron M. Piotrkowski born in Berlin in 1977, PhD 2015 at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, is a post-doctoral researcher at the Department of the History of the Jewish People and Contemporary Judaism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He is the author of *Priests in Exile: The History of the Temple of Onias and Its Community in the Hellenistic Period* (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2019) and part of the team of commentators and contributors to the forthcoming *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum IV* (ed. by N. Hacham and T. Ilan).