

Adapting and Adopting

The Biblical Joseph as Received by Artapanus, Demetrius, and Philo the Poet in Third- and Second-Century BCE Egypt

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Abstract

For many years, the fragmentary writings by Artapanus, Demetrius, and Philo the poet were insufficiently acknowledged for their profoundly illuminative content on Jewish thinking and acculturation. These fragments shed light on the perspectives of Egyptian-Jewish writers who sought not only to preserve their distinct Jewish roots but also to forge a connection with the intellectual and cultural milieu of Egypt. Central to this endeavor, yet hitherto somewhat insufficiently recognized in scholarly discussions, is the figure of the biblical Joseph, who conspicuously serves as an intermediary between these two objectives. As Jews deeply embedded within their adopted Egyptian culture, these authors endeavor in the extant fragments to provide a distinct perspective on the process of Jewish acculturation to foreign Egypt. Furthermore, they offer unparalleled insights into the reception of the figure of Joseph and his narrative in the third and second century BCE.

Keywords

Genesis 37–50 – diaspora – acculturation – Hellenistic-Jewish authors – reception history – Jewish identity

The famous story of Joseph and his brothers in Gen 37–50 has received much attention in recent years.¹ Yet, the lively reception history from Genesis on all the way to the New Testament and beyond has been somewhat neglected. This comes as a surprise, as the figure of Joseph over time became a role model for Jewish life in Egyptian diaspora contexts. Joseph's story was received in major Second Temple writings like Jubilees, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, and, of course, Philo and Josephus.² In addition, certain small, but intriguing references to the figure of Joseph can be found within fragments relayed indirectly in Eusebius's *Praeparatio evangelica*. Eusebius, in turn, cites the summaries of Alexander Polyhistor, who, presumably with significant brevity, aimed to distill the extensive writings of his sources to a singular essence, adapting them for his own intellectual objectives.³ Consequently, one is presented with fragments of an otherwise unknown writer which demand interpretation without their original (or any additional) context, having already undergone at least two editorial revisions (Polyhistor, Eusebius). Yet, each of these fragments offers a distinct perspective from the late third and early second century BCE on the reception of Joseph. Therefore, I shall undertake a comprehensive examination of these fragments, specifically focusing on the character of Joseph, and their implications for the shaping of Diaspora Jewish identity in Egypt.⁴

1 Artapanus (Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 9.23.1–4)

Artapanus, known exclusively through the accounts of Alexander Polyhistor, remains elusive regarding precise categorization. Given the frequent references

1 I would like to thank my anonymous reviewers who have devoted considerable time and energy to improving this paper in a number of ways. For recent literature on the study of Joseph and the Joseph story see Rabel, "Developing."

2 On some scattered works of the reception of Joseph in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Judaism, see Brongers, *Jozefsgeschiedenis*; Docherty, "Joseph"; Emadi, *Prisoner*, 101–120; Goldberg, "Joseph"; Hilscher, "biblische Joseph"; Jovanovic, *Joseph*; Kugel, *House*; Lisewski, *Studien*, 39–76; Niehoff, *Figure*, 54–110; Frey and Rabel, "Joseph" (forthcoming); Feldman, "Portrait 1"; Feldman, "Portrait 11"; Oertelt, *Herrscherideal*; cf. Gruen, *Heritage*, 74: "Genesis ... supplies an intricate tale, a multifaceted personality, and rich material to be exploited by Hellenistic Jews."

3 See the still fundamental study by Freudenthal: *Alexander*.

4 So far there have only been minor, incidental investigations into the figure of Joseph in these sources. See Gruen, "Twisted," who nevertheless states: "Two of the fragments, those on Abraham and Joseph, are too brief for extended comment" (437). See also some comments in Zellentin, "End," 27, 30, 61–62, 66–71. See especially some helpful remarks in Holladay, "Acts," 38–43.

to the country in his fragments, it is reasonable to situate his milieu within Egypt.⁵ The consensus perceives him as a deeply acculturated⁶ Jew⁷ who, while possibly harboring apologetic intentions, predominantly sought to highlight the distinctiveness of Hebrew-Jewish heroes—Abraham, Joseph, and Moses—in relation to the Egyptian territory and its inhabitants. This perhaps served as a counter-narrative to the prevalent exaggeration or negative portrayal of these pivotal figures.⁸ The genre of his extant fragments remains, like many facets of his work, elusive.⁹ Nonetheless, Artapanus might be appropriately characterized as “an imaginative raconteur with a deft touch, who liberally modified Scripture and transposed Gentile traditions to foreground Jewish figures.”¹⁰ This characterization is palpably evident in his interpretation of Joseph. Thus, among those cited by Eusebius, Artapanus occupies a unique position, oscillating between an independent literary figure and a transposer of Jewish history into the Egyptian milieu. This is especially noteworthy, as he presumably composed his treatise *ΙΟΥΔΑΙΚΑ* (“Judaica,” frag. 1) / *ΠΕΡΙ ΙΟΥΔΑΙΩΝ* (“Concerning the Jews,” frag. 2:1; 3:1) shortly after the genesis of the Septuagint trans-

5 Refer, e.g., to Holladay, *Historians*, 190: “Egyptian provenance is virtually certain”; also, Collins, “Artapanus,” 891. For other discussed possibilities, consult Oertelt, *Herrscherideal*, 50 n. 63.

6 Some also refer to Artapanus's views as “syncretism.” Especially noted are the links between biblical heroes and Egyptian and Greek figures, see Barclay, *Jews*, 127–132. But the question must be asked: “syncretism” with regard to which form of normative Judaism? Furthermore, he is often labelled “both a monotheist and a polytheist,” cf. Barclay, *Jews*, 132; also, Kugler, “Hearing.” It should be mentioned here that almost all inferences regarding Artapanus, his situation, and his concerns relate to the third and longest fragment. As we will see, the brief comment in fragment 2 about Joseph is also significant in this context. Indeed, for a definitive judgment on possible “syncretistic” elements in the fragments of Artapanus, more material and a normative reference would be required, hence discussing strong acculturation into Egyptian thought patterns would be more apt.

7 The prevailing consensus on Jewish identity is contradicted exclusively by Jacobson, “Artapanus,” who heavily relies on the fragmentary evidence which has, admittedly, passed through at least two hands, to decisively argue against a Jewish authorship. Whether this is inherently evident given the limited source material is, in my estimation, less clear-cut. A rejection of Jacobson's arguments can be found in Collins, “Revisited,” 59–62.

8 The writings of Manetho and his portrayal of Moses seem to be particularly referenced. See, e.g., Collins, “Artapanus,” 892; Collins, *Athens and Jerusalem*, 39–41; Walter, *Historiker*, 125 n. 20; Holladay, *Historians*, 195 n. 10. Whether there exists a connection beyond thematic proximity appears debatable to me. Concerning the apologetic-historiographical writings of Berossos and Manetho, cf. Sterling, *Historiography*, 103–136, among which Artapanus's fragments can also be classified.

9 Gruen, “Twisted,” 437.

10 Gruen, “Artapanus,” 676.

lation.¹¹ The allusions within his most extensive fragment concerning Moses suggest strong correlations with the events under Ptolemy IV Philopator or Ptolemy VI Philometor.¹² If this supposition holds, by the end of the third or mid-second century BCE, there existed a remarkably autonomous interpretation of Joseph which, as far as the evidence from silence can inform us, remained uncontested by other Jewish authors.

Despite the manifestly fragmentary nature of Artapanus's writings, fragment 2 introduces Joseph congruently with the Genesis narrative, presenting him as a descendant of Abraham and the son of Jacob.¹³ This connects fragment 2 with fragment 1, where Abraham is briefly depicted. Specifically concerning Egyptian matters and the Egyptian territory, Abraham is depicted as the individual who, during his twenty-year sojourn in Egypt, tells the Egyptian king Pharethothes¹⁴ about astrology (who has heard about astrology for the first time, it seems¹⁵). Diverging from the Genesis account, the famine prompting Abraham's escape is omitted, as is the inappropriate misrepresentation of

11 The secondary citation by Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 1.23.154.2) titled ΠΕΡΙ ΙΟΥΔΑΙΩΝ might suggest a probable title, according to Freudenthal, *Alexander*, 216; Holladay, *Historians*, 194 n. 4. However, it remains indeterminate whether this title belongs to Polyhistor or indeed Artapanus. Concerning the title of his work, one's knowledge is as limited as it is about the historical "Artapanus" himself.

12 The *terminus a quo* is marked by the LXX translation for Genesis, approximately situated in the mid-third century. Except for recent (noteworthy!) arguments from Hitchcock ("Septuagint") this position has remained largely uncontested, following the influential early study of Freudenthal: *Alexander*, 143–174. See also, e.g., Zellentin, "End," 32–33. The *terminus ad quem* coincides with the time Polyhistor penned his work, conclusively before his sudden demise in 35 BCE, cf. Sterling, *Historiography*, 168; Gruen, "Artapanus," 676. Collins, "Artapanus," 891; Collins (*Athens and Jerusalem*, 38) originally argued for a dating in the late third century, though later revised this position (cf. Collins, "Revisited," 62), aligning more closely with Holladay, *Historians*, 190, dating the fragments during the reign of Ptolemy VI Philometor. Zellentin ("End," 52–63) proposes a notably specific date range between 118 and 116 BCE, considering an apparent reference to the Ptolemaic decree of 118 BCE. Collins ("Revisited," 62–63) dismisses this link, deeming it possible but restrictively precise.

13 The foundation of my remarks is the critical edition by Holladay: *Historians*, 204–225.

14 Φαρεθώθης likely represents a slightly modified form for "Pharaoh." Although not mentioned in Genesis in the narratives surrounding Abraham, it was a conventional designation for Egypt's sovereign, cf. Walter, *Historiker*, 127 1c.

15 The translations presented by Gruen ("Artapanus," 677) and Collins ("Artapanus," 897) appear imprecise. The text claims that Egypt learned of astrology through Abraham, which is accentuated by the otherwise pleonastic specification τὴν ἀστρολογίαν. This interpretation is rightly upheld by Walter (*Historiker*, 127). This observation aligns with the pronounced exaltation of the biblical figures Abraham, Joseph, and Moses, all of whom are portrayed as benefactors (or even educators) to the Egyptians, enlightening them in their perceived ignorance (see frag. 2:3; esp. 3:4). The notion that Abraham was acquainted

Sarah's status.¹⁶ Here, Artapanus markedly deviates from the biblical account: Abraham arrives—seemingly of his own volition—without any baggage and assumes the role of instructor to the Egyptians.¹⁷ Given the amenable conditions of the land, many who accompanied him opted for a prolonged stay in Egypt. Among them was probably not Jacob, who is mentioned again while still in Syria. Among Jacob's sons, Joseph appears to be particularly prominent: συνέσει δὲ καὶ φρονήσει παρὰ τοὺς ἄλλους διενεγκόντα¹⁸ (frag. 2:1). The participle διενεγκόντα seems to bear a causal connotation, and both datives, semantically related, pertain to cognition. The verb διαφέρω, in later LXX writings, implies supremacy.¹⁹ Frequently employed by both Philo and Josephus, it is recurrently used as a divine predicate.²⁰ Although in classical usage φρόνησις can lean towards arrogance and pride—aligning with more recent interpretations of Gen 37:2–11 which portray Joseph as a self-absorbed, egocentric character²¹—this inclination, due to its association with the positive σύνεσις, seems not to be Artapanus's focus. Instead, he reshapes the narrative, completely omitting mentions of Joseph's arrogance, the propagation of malicious gossip, and the egocentrically audacious dream accounts. Now, it is the brothers' envy that propels them to plot against him (ὕπὸ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἐπιβουλευθῆναι). Due to his unparalleled knowledge and insight, Joseph foresees (προϊδόμενον) this malicious intent (ἐπισύστασις) and evades it.²² This is facilitated by his request to the neighboring Arabs, who remain unspecified, to transport him to Egypt. The rationale behind their compliance, within Artapanus's logic, emerges from

with, and taught, astrology is corroborated by the fragments of Pseudo-Eupolemus. A complete repudiation of this idea can be found in Philo's writings, specifically *Abr.* 69–71, 77, cf. Collins, "Artapanus," 897; and similarly in *Gen. Rab.* 46, 87.

16 Concerning the figure of Sarah and her transformations in ancient Jewish receptions, consult McDonald, *Searching*.

17 Cf. Gruen, "Artapanus," 677: "These writers plainly endeavor to transform Abraham into a bringer of culture who transmits learning to Near Eastern peoples on a broad front beyond the framework of the biblical traditions."

18 "He excelled all the other sons of Jacob in wisdom and understanding." All English translations derive from DiTommaso, "Demetrius."

19 Lust, Eynikel, and Hauspie, *Greek*, s.v.

20 Bertram, "φρήν κτλ.," 227–229.

21 Cf. Rabel, "Softening a Malicious Report"; Rabel, "Developing."

22 While translating ἐπισύστασις as "conspiracy" may lexically align (cf. Collins, "Artapanus," 897; Gruen, "Artapanus," 677), it is contextually counterintuitive in the sentence's progression. After all, the conspiracy was already in motion, premeditated, and fully conceived. Only its culmination was pending. Joseph evaded this through his anticipatory actions. Thus, ἐπισύστασις is more aptly translated as "assault" or, in a gentler tone, "uprising," as suggested by Walter, *Historiker*, 127.

the shared lineage between the Arabs and Jacob's family. They are descendants of Israel, Abraham's sons, and Isaac's brothers: εἶναι γὰρ τοὺς τῶν Ἀράβων βασιλεῖς ἀπογόνους Ἰσραήλ, υἱοὺς τοῦ Ἀβραάμ, Ἰσαὰκ δὲ ἀδελφούς.²³ Understanding the latter part of this sentence as an explanatory apposition for ἀπογόνους Ἰσραήλ highlights either Polyhistor's or Artapanus's misunderstanding or a scribal error. Israel was not Abraham's father and such a misconception seems unlikely. Polyhistor is undoubtedly acquainted with Israel's history and the lineage of its foundational figures from Genesis. The same applies to Artapanus, as all three fragments are clearly oriented towards Genesis. The narratives diverge only where they seek to emphasize particular points against this foundational backdrop. A complete detachment from the Genesis account would neither serve the defense of paradigmatic behaviors nor facilitate acculturation. There is nothing for Artapanus to gain from such a deliberate mix-up. The fragment's text is indisputably referring to Ἰσμαήλ, which only differs by one letter from Ἰσραήλ and even looks similar in script (ρ // μ).²⁴ Thus, Joseph essentially asks his distant relatives, in almost a friendly manner, for transportation to Egypt. There is no mention of wandering in Shechem or the horrific abandonment in the cistern and the subsequent murder plots against him. The point is not to absolve the brothers—why would it be?²⁵ The emphasis is on Joseph willingly, or through his intelligence, traveling to Egypt, which is a haven against his brothers' treachery, but more so, becomes the homeland of his choice. He could have sought refuge among his "brothers," the Arabs. The portrayal of Egypt in a positive light is unmistakable; even the Arabs, whoever they precisely may be, are keen to go there. Without hesitation, they comply with Joseph's request (τοὺς δὲ τὸ ἐντυγχανόμενον ποιήσαι). This is the secondary emphasis of the first section of fragment 2: On the one hand, there is Joseph, the wise seer who shapes and treads his own path. On the other hand, there are the others, yielding to his will.

After introducing the two main points, they are closely linked to the country of Egypt and applied to the conditions there. Again, Joseph is the main agent, as indicated by the semantic activum ἐλθόντα. Without a trial of his character, without mentioning his learning process with Potiphar, without the slander

23 "For the kings of the Arabs, being the sons of Abraham and brothers of Isaac, are descendants of Israel."

24 There is no imperative to dismiss the possibility of a scribal error, as moving both "sons" and "brothers" to the singular would then be necessitated, as posited by Collins, "Artapanus," 897. The matter pertains to the sheer logic of descent, whereby the collective of Arabs would have become sons and brothers. The argument for the interchange of letters was first advanced by Freudenthal, *Alexander*, 232.

25 As suggested by Walter, *Historiker*, 127 nll 1a.

of Potiphar's wife, and without a detour through prison, Artapanus tells us plainly that Joseph was presented to the king and elevated to the position of manager of the entire country.²⁶ With him a turning point occurs, as the Egyptians had previously managed the land poorly and unfairly. Only with Joseph (τοῦτον πρῶτον) was the land properly organized, and untapped potential realized. He allocated a specific portion of the fields to the priests, bringing order to the apparent chaos of the Egyptians. It becomes clear that this is likely an hagiographical account further emphasizing cultural supremacy: Joseph—as a culmination of the previously narrated examples—discovered measurements. It is left unsaid how one should imagine the previous state of the Egyptian agricultural and financial structure—Joseph arrives and cultivates the chaotic Egyptians,²⁷ and they love him dearly (μεγάλως) for it. Gruen rightly notes: “Artapanus offers a much more generous portrait of Joseph than does the narrative in Gen. 47:13–26.”²⁸ But should general remarks only refer to Gen 47? Measurements are presupposed there, and there is no discussion about land distribution. Joseph seems to oblige and enslave the land, placing it entirely under the Pharaoh's control. Only the priests are briefly mentioned in both narratives (47:26). There is no mention of a famine—it seems to be Joseph's economic sense that drove his actions, for which he received the highest appreciation from the Egyptians. The unmentioned reaction to the strict events of the Genesis agricultural reform would likely have been different. Artapanus seems keen on portraying Joseph in harmony with the Egyptians while emphasizing his revolutionary improvements. Again, he underscores both aspects of Joseph: his wisdom and the fact that he was followed by (the) unknowing who depended on it.

Consistently, Joseph marries an Egyptian woman, Aseneth. While she is the daughter of the non-Jewish priest of Heliopolis (as in the LXX), this fact is not problematized, consistent with Genesis and later interpretations of Gen 41:45.²⁹ Later, his brothers and father join him, bringing many assets (πολλήν ὑπαρξιν). This emphasis again attempts to underline the foreigners' blessing for the Egyptians. They merge with the Egyptian surroundings, settling in Heliopo-

26 Regarding the translation of Gruen, “Artapanus,” 678, of διοικητὴν τῆς ὅλης χώρας as “minister of finance,” no detailed rationale is provided. This translation appears to me neither linguistically nor substantively intuitive, especially when considering the template provided in Genesis.

27 See Niehoff, *Figure*, 49: “In this way, Joseph becomes the founder of the Egypt's social and economic structure.” Refer also to Gruen, *Heritage*, 87–89.

28 Gruen, “Artapanus,” 678.

29 With the well-known exception of Joseph and Aseneth which at least partly is a novelistic treatise to resolve questions of intermarriage.

lis and Sais, where they have offspring—probably in a different location than the Land of Goshen mentioned in Genesis.³⁰ The comment καὶ τοὺς Σύρους πλεονάσαι ἐν τῇ Αἰγύπτῳ appears like a summary. The foreigners multiply in Egypt (not in Heliopolis or Sais). Artapanus refers to them as “Syrians” (Σύροι) and also as “Hermiouth” (Ἑρμιούθ),³¹ thereby connecting Abraham and Joseph (frag. 2:4) without calling them Jews. In his representation, they are simply Syrians who bring immense blessing and prosperity from the north to Egypt. Later, the exodus will happen to the north-east, returning the Jewish people back to the land of Abraham and Joseph.³² Interestingly, these “Syrians” show a religious openness, as they are credited with completing the temples in Athos and Heliopolis. This act is another independent example of intercultural interaction and acculturation of Jewish people in the Egyptian diaspora. Such actions reflect the beneficial deeds of the Jews for the Egyptians by being deeply connected with Egyptian customs and culture.

The narrative concludes, after a brief summary about Joseph’s agricultural policy in parallel to Genesis, with Joseph’s death. His demise is closely linked with the death of the king of Egypt. This is consistent with the last piece of information about Joseph in the fragment: τῆς Αἰγύπτου δεσπότην γενέσθαι, an expression of power and dignity. This level of authority is unparalleled except in Demetrius (Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 9.21.12). While Genesis can speak of Joseph as lord and the second-most powerful in the state, it does not refer to him as δεσπότης.³³ Some see part of fragment 2:4 as an addendum, possibly misplaced by Eusebius. The summary of Joseph’s activity, which for the first time speaks of seven years and the collection of excess grain, appears “almost as an afterthought,”³⁴ as Joseph’s death had already been reported. However, a good sense of this addition emerges in the renewed emphasis on his powerful position. The close relationship between Joseph’s death and that of the king of Egypt already hinted at this and is further expounded: his clever agricultural policy earned him the position of a δεσπότης, if one interprets γενέσθαι as “becoming.” Thus, the addendum in fragment 2:4 would narrate the climax of Joseph’s career, from being the extraordinary son of Jacob to being appointed as administrator or minister (διοικητής) to the δεσπότης of Egypt. This read-

30 Gruen, “Artapanus,” 678.

31 This is likely a creative formation by Artapanus from Ἑρμ(ῆς) + Ἰουδαῖοι, with an Egyptianized ending, translating as “Moses-Jews,” as noted by Walter, *Historiker*, 127 nI 1a; cf. frag. 1.

32 Zellentin, “End,” 67 n. 82.

33 Cf. Gruen, “Artapanus,” 678.

34 Gruen, “Artapanus”; also, Walter, *Historiker*, 128 nII 4c.

ing is further supported by the beginning of fragment 3, where Abraham and his son are mentioned: “that when Abraham had died and his son Mempasasthenoth, and also the king of the Egyptians, his son Palmanothes succeeded to dominion.” It is possible that the name Abraham should be replaced by Joseph here, unless Mempasasthenoth is a variation of Zaphenath-paneah, the Egyptian name for Joseph. All this would reinforce the idea that Joseph, according to Artapanus, did indeed become (as powerful as) Pharaoh of Egypt. No higher power and honor could be imagined, especially for Joseph, the self-determined outsider followed by everyone.

Artapanus emphasizes the harmony and integration of Joseph, as a descendant of Abraham and Jacob, with Egypt and its people. He devotes less space to Joseph’s background in Syria and more on the blessing Joseph brings to Egypt. Egypt benefits from him as an inventor, a wise manager, and an astute leader. He brings abundant blessings, both through his knowledge and the wealth of his family. In doing so, he himself becomes an Egyptian. Along with his family, he transcends ethnic, behavioral, and cultural boundaries to the Egyptians’ benefit. As an honorable and powerful δεσπότης (*despotes* or “master”) of the Egyptians, his life and career conclude.

Artapanus’s agenda is thus found in his apologetic approach: with great openness to theological and ethical compromises, even if they include non-biblical narrative elements, the Egyptians owe a great deal to the Syrians. Just as they once deeply loved Joseph, they are now encouraged to love his descendants. In his narration, Artapanus offers a remarkably independent story that converges with the well-known tale only at a few points. In some places, especially in the third fragment and its hyperbolic portrayal of Moses, the narrative is so free, forming a “cultural synthesis,”³⁵ that it can stand alone among the diaspora writings preserved. Bowley rightly emphasizes, “Artapanus presents these heroes in unique and colorful ways.”³⁶ Behind this seems to be something more than zealous apologetics. More likely, Artapanus’s cultural and theological views are representative of “a large segment of Diaspora Jews who did not find pagan traditions threatening or compromising to fidelity to their religious traditions.”³⁷ We might simply no longer know much about this kind of Jewish belief. Thus, in this respect, Artapanus remains the sole witness to “the possibility of being both a proud Egyptian and a self-conscious Jew.”³⁸

35 Barclay, *Jews*, 132.

36 Bowley, “Artapanus,” 387.

37 Holladay, *Historians*, 193.

38 Barclay, *Jews*, 132.

2 Demetrius, the Chronographer (Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 9.21.1–18)

In Demetrius's work, one encounters some of the oldest Greek testimonies to ancient Jewish receptions of Joseph.³⁹ Predominantly, the fragments we have of his work⁴⁰ are dated to the reign of Ptolemy IV Philopator, placing them proximately in both time and location to the completion of the Pentateuch-LXX.⁴¹ His viewpoint contrasts starkly with that of Artapanus. From the fragments, no signs of Artapanus's strong acculturation can be deduced, nor are there any evident reinterpretations. Recently, Dhont demonstrated that Demetrius was indeed proficient in Greek, potentially qualifying him formally as a historian.⁴² However, whether this assertion stands robust, especially considering the transmission (and alterations) by Alexander Polyhistor and by Eusebius, remains questionable to me. Distinctively, an educational intent is discernible from the fragments, answering chronological and content-based questions in a Hellenistic style of ἀπορίαι καὶ λύσεις.⁴³ Apologetics seems less central, as the difficulties highlighted might not have been deterrents to non-Jews sympathetic to the Jewish cause.⁴⁴ As prior discussions on Joseph have shown, the complexities discussed here have not previously posed noticeable challenges in Joseph's reception and narrative.⁴⁵

In keeping with his historiographic-chronological expositions, Demetrius primarily investigates Joseph concerning datable life events. Even though we have already noticed the inherent chronology of the Joseph narrative to be somewhat deficient, Demetrius begins with the seventeen-year-old Joseph

39 Hanson, "Demetrius," 844; Walter, "Fragmente," 282: "der älteste datierbare jüdisch-alexandrinische Autor." On Demetrius's reception of Joseph see some remarks in DiTommaso, "Note."

40 The foundation of my remarks is the critical edition by Holladay, *Historians*, 62–79.

41 Representing the majority view are, e.g., DiTommaso, "Demetrius," 669; Collins, *Athens and Jerusalem*, 33. Clancy ("Demetrius") stands alone in proposing a composition date of 141 BCE. However, this is at best a possibility, which in my estimation is scarcely supported by the drawn parallels.

42 Dhont, "Greek." Regarding the way he works and argues in a "historical" manner see Niehoff, *Jewish Exegesis*.

43 Among others, Walter ("Fragmente," 281) categorizes Artapanus among historians and Demetrius among exegetes. See also Holladay, *Historians*, 51. A compilation of various classifications can be found in Collins, *Athens and Jerusalem*, 33. A solution that, in my perspective, is apt is proposed by Sterling (*Historiography*, 166) who describes Demetrius as an "exegetical chronographer." On the issue of Alexandrian hermeneutics and Jewish authors see again Niehoff, *Jewish Exegesis*.

44 Collins, *Athens and Jerusalem*, 34; Sterling, *Historiography*, 162.

45 See, e.g., Rabel, "Developing."

from Gen 37:2. Drawing from the age reference of thirty years in Gen 41:46, he calculates a thirteen-year interval (frag. 2:11) that Joseph supposedly spent entirely in prison. How the extensive accounts from Gen 37:12–36, 39:1–20 fit chronologically remains unaddressed. Of more significance to him is explaining the 430 years in Canaan and Egypt promised in Exod 12:40 (Proto-MT posits these 430 years solely in Egypt). Under the tight premise that “chronology and genealogy were complementary,”⁴⁶ Demetrius ardently attempts to validate this exact duration. Consequently, fragment 2:11 is deeply engaged in arranging the lifespans of the patriarchs accordingly.⁴⁷ In this framework, Joseph is just one of the many genealogically significant figures.

In addition to the times in Canaan and prison, Demetrius recounts the episode of Joseph interpreting Pharaoh’s dreams and Joseph’s marriage to Aseneth. Notably, he mentions her pagan-priestly lineage and the birth of their children. All these events, especially the marriage, are retold from Gen 41:45. Accordingly, there is no critique.⁴⁸ Unlike the prominent narrative in Joseph and Aseneth, Demetrius sees no issue in Joseph marrying a non-Jewish woman—at least not in the text available to us. Perhaps, the issue Joseph and Aseneth addresses simply did not exist in Demetrius’s time, place, and milieu.

In the chronological recapitulation that fragment 2 rigorously deals with, a question is addressed that has also spurred academic discussion:⁴⁹ why didn’t Joseph, after his rise to power, immediately send for his father to bring him (and his family) to Egypt?⁵⁰ This question is explicitly tackled by Demetrius in fragment 2:13, a unique approach among ancient Jewish texts. His explanation hinges on the occupation of the father, and thus the entire family. Jacob was a shepherd (ποιμήν), and the act of shepherding (τὸ ποιμαίνειν) was disgraceful (ἐπινειδιστος) in the eyes of the Egyptians. He substantiates this with a reference to Gen 46:34, where Joseph himself instructs his family to tell Pharaoh, upon being asked about their occupation, that they are cattle herders (ἄνδρες κτηνοτρόφοι). The emphasis lies clearly on an argument from authority: “he himself” tells us.⁵¹ For Demetrius, this argument from authority covering an

46 DiTommaso, “Demetrius,” 671.

47 This is only feasible through a mathematical sleight of hand, as demonstrated by DiTommaso, “Demetrius,” 670–671.

48 Likewise missing is Joseph’s new name, which already varies between the Proto-MT and LXX and holds no significance in subsequent chapters of the Joseph story in Gen 42–50.

49 Cf., e.g., Ages, “Why Didn’t Joseph?”

50 For rabbinic perspectives addressing these and subsequent questions surrounding Joseph in Demetrius, with relevant parallels, see Ron, “Exegesis.” However, they do not clarify Demetrius’s stance on these matters.

51 DiTommaso, “Demetrius,” 671. Demetrius’s way of arguing could also indicate the value he

argumentative weakness seems to settle the matter and answer the question. However, to the modern reader it does not.⁵² The initial question sought to understand why, immediately after his ascension post Gen 41:45, Joseph did not summon his family. This answer remains elusive even within Demetrius's style of Homeric commentary.⁵³ While the reference to Gen 46:34 highlights the dramatic implications behind Joseph's apparent lack of concern for his family after his rise to power, it does not provide a solution.

The next conundrum is introduced by διαπορεῖσθαι, aligning with the Hellenistic style of problem and solution (cf. frag. 5: ἐπιζητεῖν).⁵⁴ Evidently, the quintuple portion that Joseph served his youngest (favored) brother during their first meal together (Gen 43:34) was early perceived as excessive for one man's consumption (μὴ δυναμένου αὐτοῦ τοσαῦτα καταναλῶσαι κρέα, frag. 2:14). Similarly, there is the question of the five sets of garments and the three hundred pieces of gold (Proto-MT: silver) from Gen 45:22. The manuscripts are unclear whether Leah's sons received two garments or a two-part garment (διπλός) although I favor two garments each, in line with Gen 45:22. Demetrius's explanation hinges on simple arithmetic. By serving Benjamin five portions, along with the one Joseph consumed himself, the same number as the portions of Leah's six sons⁵⁵ was achieved. By this act, Joseph reestablished equilibrium between Jacob's two wives, implicitly honoring Rachel in the ancestral matriarchal contest. However, this explanation veers away from the straightforward internal narrative, which simply aims to underscore the special bond between Benjamin and Joseph.⁵⁶ Moreover, this interpretation is deficient. For the goal of equalizing Rachel's house (ὥστε τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ τῆς μητρὸς εἶναι ἴσον, frag. 2:15) to be realized, Joseph would also need to receive or allocate a garment for himself, which is not mentioned. Moreover, Benjamin received five garments and three hundred pieces of gold, making six or twelve

places on a (possible) text from Genesis that he has in front of him, which he assumes is accessible to his readers and which he assumes transcribes Joseph's own thinking. This, of course, remains highly speculative. On traces of text criticism in Alexandria see Niehoff, *Jewish Exegesis*, 112–129.

52 More recent studies, such as Oertelt, *Herrscherideal*, 48, seem to consider Demetrius's explanation as sufficient, even though it does not actually resolve the raised question. On the question whether historically, shepherding was disgraceful to some Egyptians, as well as eating with shepherds or farmers (Gen 43:32), see Rabel, "Vereintes."

53 Cf. Niehoff, *Jewish Exegesis*.

54 Hanson, "Demetrius," 851.

55 The manuscripts read διὰ τὸ ἐκ τῆς Λείας τῷ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ γεγονέναι υἱοὺς ἑπτὰ. This is probably an error on Demetrius's part, but it still shows a further uncertainty in his maths.

56 On the pragmatics of the meal scene in Gen 43:31–34 see Rabel, "Missing."

garments on one side and five garments plus gold on the other. There is effectively no way to really redress the balance, except to say that the three hundred pieces of gold are the pecuniary compensation for the imbalance. As the narrative views these gifts as a dowry for the journey and the father, Demetrius's calculation shows a certain imbalance, ultimately not answering the objection in a logically clear way.

Demetrius's reflections undeniably highlight real logical, chronological, and moral inconsistencies in the biblical text. Concerning Joseph, Demetrius strives for credibility and consistency in the scriptures foundational for the Jewish diaspora's existence. Utilizing the instructive style of problem and solution, as observed in the fragments on Joseph, Demetrius likely addresses questions from his academic circle or community. Whether these solutions are satisfactory remains uncertain. However, as we have noted, they are scarcely utilizable for apologetics.⁵⁷

Nevertheless, Demetrius provides noteworthy insights in several respects. His account serves as a testament to the early utilization of the LXX-Genesis.⁵⁸ Simultaneously, his handling of the issues showcases an exegetical practice that, while not altering the text, transcends it. He perceives symbolism in numbers, augments the text with elucidative details, and discerns a deeper meaning behind seemingly plain narratives, like the Joseph novella. In this sense, Demetrius can be seen as the pioneer of Alexandrian hermeneutics, undoubtedly preceding the similarly intricate yet more elaborate exegesis of Philo of Alexandria.⁵⁹ He embodies a diaspora Jewish, Greek-speaking interest in historiographical questions, which elevate the Genesis narrative as foundational mythos while conveying intellectual integrity. This can be interpreted as "an attempt to shape the self-understanding of the Jewish community,"⁶⁰ which generally sought to trace its origins far back in history to establish primacy and authoritative interpretation.⁶¹ This was particularly necessary given the challenges of Hellenism.⁶² By structuring Jewish history and demonstrating its logical (?) consistency, Demetrius facilitated a self-perception between some

57 While it might be accurate to assert broadly across the fragments that "the credibility of the biblical record had to be established in the face of the growing critical awareness of the Hellenistic Jews themselves," as suggested by Collins (*Athens and Jerusalem*, 35) the logical frailty of Demetrius's arguments concerning Joseph is all the more remarkable.

58 See already in Freudenthal, *Alexander*, 40–41; later also in Walter, "Fragmente," 281; Holladay, *Historians*, 52, and others.

59 Holladay, 53–54; Hanson, "Demetrius," 845, lean towards this interpretation.

60 Collins, *Athens and Jerusalem*, 35.

61 Cf. Sterling, *Historiography*, 163–164.

62 Sterling, 166.

sort of Jewish thought and acculturation to a new cultural milieu. In what way and to what extent this acculturation became a reality, of course, remains unclear. However, it would be presumptive to claim that Demetrius addresses the marriage of Moses and Zipporah in fragment 3 to affirm Moses's adherence to the law.⁶³ The opposite seems true. Once again, Demetrius's query pertains to plausibility within Alexandrian hermeneutics, which he substantiates through chronological considerations.⁶⁴ Were the question about exogamous sexuality and marriage pertinent, Demetrius would need to address the union of Joseph and Aseneth, which he pointedly does not. As in Artapanus, such concerns, it appears, were not (yet?) deemed significant.

3 Philo, the (Epic) Poet (Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 9.24.1)

Our last fragment is also preserved only through the collection of Alexander Polyhistor, and his citation in Eusebius's *Praep. ev.* 9.24.1. In total, six fragments have survived,⁶⁵ written by an otherwise unknown Philo, who is neither identical with the well-known Philo of Alexandria (because Alexander Polyhistor compiled his work based on sources much earlier than Philo's) nor with Philo the Elder, as the linguistic style differs significantly.⁶⁶ As the geographically-polis-oriented title of his work ΠΕΡΙ ΙΕΡΟΣΟΛΥΜΑ⁶⁷ and the epically-expansive style indicate,⁶⁸ the author places himself firmly in the tradition of Hellenistic epic poets, highlighting "the degree of appropriation of Greek culture by some Jews in the Hellenistic period who used Greek forms to celebrate their heritage."⁶⁹ Part of this historically laudatory introduction to Jerusalem is the recapitulation of Abraham (frags. 1–2) and Joseph (3).

63 As posited by Collins, *Athens and Jerusalem*, 34.

64 On this see Niehoff, *Jewish Exegesis*, 38–57.

65 The enumeration of fragments in various textual editions differs. In this work, I adhere to a method of counting by fragment and verse, wherein the Joseph torso is designated as fragment 3. This is in line with Attridge, "Philo ΟΤΡ," 783; Attridge, "Philo ΟΤΒ," 728; Holladay, *Poets*, 238–239. The foundational text follows Holladay, *Poets*, 234–245, which, with minor deviations and an independent textual-critical apparatus, is adopted by Kuhn-Treichel, *Epiker*, 22–27.

66 The most persuasive defense asserting that Philo the Elder and Philo the Epic Poet are two distinct authors remains that of Walter, "Epik," 139–140. The majority of exegetes posit that this Philo already had access to the LXX version of Genesis. This was recently challenged (unconvincingly) solely by Kuhn-Treichel, *Epiker*, 38–49.

67 "Concerning Jerusalem," see frag. 1:1, 3:1, 4:1.

68 Concerning style, refer to Kuhn-Treichel, *Epiker*, 62–72.

69 Attridge, "Philo ΟΤΒ," 726.

In the few verses about Joseph, Philo deals with the history of the patriarchs, which he conceives as preparation for the ultimate goal, the blessed place (ἔδος μακαριστόν) Jerusalem.⁷⁰ Not only Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were of great significance (frag. 3:3–4a), but also Joseph. He is solely discussed in his role as a dream interpreter. The generally difficult-to-understand verses⁷¹ are translated here in various interpretive ways. Walter translates: “[Joseph], who as the herald of dreams (became) ruler on Egypt’s thrones.”⁷² Holladay and Kuhn translate in a similar way.⁷³ According to their logic, it was the successful dream interpretation that led Joseph’s career to wielding the scepter, as described in Gen 41. In contrast, Attridge translates both in 1985 and again in 2013: “[Joseph] who was interpreter of dreams for the scepter bearer on Egypt’s throne.”⁷⁴ They describe the events in Gen 41:1–36 more narrowly, without considering his subsequent career. In my view, the first interpretation is preferable, but should be translated slightly differently than Walter did: “[Joseph], who as the interpreter of dreams [became] the bearer of the scepter on the thrones of Egypt.” The reason for this is the nominative σκηπτούχος, which is rather to be read as a secondary apposition to θεσπιστής. Thus, he would not be a ruler like the δεσπότης in Artapanus, but simply one endowed with great power,⁷⁵ as the investiture scene Gen 41:42–44 also describes. In line with the development of Gen 41, a process of becoming seems to be in focus, rather than a state. However, the missing verb makes this reading speculative.

What is more important is that the emphasis of Joseph’s description lies in the explanatory postscript of fragment 3:6, where dream interpretation is explicitly detailed in parallelism. The translation is: “by⁷⁶ turning [i.e., revealing] the mysteries of time in the flood of fate.” In this, Philo understands dream interpretation within the mindset of Hellenistic conceptions of fate. From Philo’s perspective, Joseph’s correct dream interpretations reveal things hid-

70 The most apparent interpretation would be that frags. 4–6 and the probable title of the work attest to a clear connection to Jerusalem. Alternatively, the term ἔδος could more generally refer to the promised land, wherein Jerusalem would later be situated. See Attridge, “Philo OTB,” 728 for reference.

71 Collins, “Philo,” 1080: “In Philo’s case, many passages are ambiguous and barely intelligible.”

72 Walter, “Epik,” 150: “[Joseph], der als der Träume Kündler Herrscher auf Ägyptens Thronen (wurde).”

73 Holladay, *Poets*, 239; Kuhn-Treichel, *Epiker*, 27.

74 Attridge, “Philo OTP,” 784; “Philo OTB,” 728.

75 For more insights, consult Montanari, *Brill Dictionary*, s.v. σκηπτούχος.

76 Certainly, one could also consider the causal resolution of the participle conjunction, as suggested by Walter, “Epik,” 150. Yet, by adopting a modal resolution, the explicative function of Joseph’s dream interpretation in frag. 3:6 becomes even more pronounced.

den in fate, things that in a linear concept of time would have happened later. Given the pompous language of the fragment, the quite commonplace Hellenistic talk of $\mu\omicron\iota\rho\alpha$ is surprising. It shows “that Philo had no great aversion to heathen concepts.”⁷⁷ One might even go so far as to see in it an example of the “degree to which Jews were becoming part of that dominant culture”⁷⁸ without thereby abandoning their own religious and/or cultural boundaries.⁷⁹ Instead, it documents “the author’s desire to express his tradition in an idiom familiar to the Hellenistic world.”⁸⁰

Overall, the brief reference to Joseph in Philo’s work is not revolutionary. However, it provides insight into the assimilative tendencies of an ancient Jewish author who fit well into the Alexandria of the third to second century BCE.⁸¹ A clear apologetics like in Artapanus or a doctrinal record like in Demetrius are not evident, nor is there an “attempt to glorify tradition,”⁸² as the fragments simply provide too scanty a source for such far-reaching interpretations. Therefore, caution is also advised in placing Joseph particularly in the spotlight.⁸³ We simply do not know to what extent the context of Philo’s work also took into account the other patriarchs. But the fact that Joseph, the otherwise neglected main character of Genesis, appears among the book’s forefathers, as already with Artapanus and Demetrius, is noteworthy.

4 Conclusion

With Artapanus on one side and Demetrius on the other, we may have before us the entire spectrum of diaspora Jewish, Egypto-centric interpretations of Joseph from the late third or early second century BCE. All these authors utilize different forms to locate and solidify their own history, while at the same time keeping an eye on adapting to new circumstances. Through various linguistic forms, from Artapanus and Demetrius to the epic poet Philo, the figure of Joseph took on a significant role for diaspora Jewish life and thought. Of

⁷⁷ Collins, *Athens and Jerusalem*, 55.

⁷⁸ Attridge, “Philo OTB,” 726.

⁷⁹ Collins, *Athens and Jerusalem*, 57, seems to lean in this direction.

⁸⁰ Collins, *Athens and Jerusalem*; see also Attridge, “Philo OTP,” 781.

⁸¹ This perspective is consistent with the prevailing scholarly consensus. See, e.g., Attridge, “Philo OTP,” 781; Holladay, *Poets*, 208–210; Attridge, “Philo OTB,” 726; Collins, *Athens and Jerusalem*, 57; Walter, “Epik,” 143–146.

⁸² Collins, 54.

⁸³ Attridge, “Philo OTP,” 781 alludes to this. However, the emphasis on Joseph is omitted in Attridge, “Philo OTB,” 726.

course, all three works and sections fulfil their own roles and cannot simply be compared. Nevertheless, it is striking how strongly all three authors show the Homeric influence dominant in Alexandria within their hermeneutics.⁸⁴ The author's writings can be compared primarily due to the fact that Joseph occupies an important position for the few fragments that still exist. He is both a role model and an individual with his own story of coming from Syria to Egypt and building a life there. Through references back to the biblical story of Joseph, his actions are located in the world of Jewish thought, but Artapanus in particular includes countless independent elements that emphasize the importance of Jewish existence for the Egyptians and thus open up a channel of dialogue at eye level (or even with a hint of superiority). This autonomy in simultaneous connection to the tradition of the Hebrew Bible may provide an exemplary insight into the process of acculturation of Jewish life in Egypt, without, of course, generalizing it. The character of Joseph within these writings is the portrayal of one possible, nonetheless important, way to preserve some Jewish customs and ideas, while at the same time being as open as possible to other influences, thus facilitating life in the diaspora by following their respective interpretations of Joseph as a biblical model.

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84 On this see above and Niehoff, *Jewish Exegesis*.

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