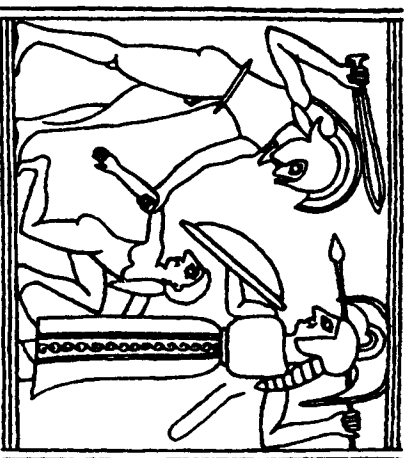


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A Jewish Asylum in Greco-Roman Egypt

In 1875 A. Daninos made squeezes of six inscriptions he had been shown in Cairo, which he sent to E. MÜLLER in Paris for publication.¹ One of these stones had been found under supervised conditions, a Latin inscription excavated at Nicopolis east of Alexandria in 1871 (now *CIL* III 6609); of this one alone Daninos could report to MÜLLER the origin and present location. The other five he may have seen in the possession of antiquities dealers. We know today that four of these stones derive from the gymnasium at Antinopolis.² But the remaining one, an alabaster stele, has stayed a mystery. MÜLLER wrote that the inscription was „found in Cairo”; that is true only in the sense that Daninos had found it in Cairo. In 1881 THEODOR MOMMSEN knew somewhat more. He says the stele was „found in Lower Egypt” (Cairo is indeed in Lower Egypt) and came eventually to the Cairo residence of the Dutch ambassador to Egypt; subsequently it was donated to the imperial museum in Berlin. It is now on loan to the Jewish Museum in New York City. Of the many editors of this now-famous text, MOMMSEN is the only one who ever saw the stone.

Miller, *RevArch* 30 (1875) 111–112 (squeeze); Mommsen, *EphEpigr* 4 (1881) 25–26 [Dessau, *ILS* 574; *CIL* III Suppl. 6583; Wülken, *BPW* 16 (1896) 1493; Strack, *Dynastie der Ptolemäer*, Berlin, 1897, 262 no. 130; Th. Reinach, *REJ* 45 (1902) 163; Dittenberger, *OGIS* 129; Schürer, *Geschichte* III, 1909, 41; *JGR* I 1315; *Christ. Willek* 54; Diehl, *Lat. Christ.* II 4936; Frey, *CJ* 1449 (with photograph); *SB* 8880; E. Gabba, *Iscrizioni greche e latine per lo studio della Bibbia*, Marietti 1958, no. 8, (with Frey’s photograph); D. M. Lewis, *CPI* III p. 144; G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, IV,

¹ Daninos was active in the 1870’s in behalf of several French enterprises committed to the exploration of Egypt, employed first by the Louvre, then by Mariette, and then the French Ministry of Culture; see *RevArch* n.s. 21 (1870) 109, 22 (1870) 94, 27 (1874) 145 (with L. Robert, *Hellenica* 1 [1940] 21–23, attributing the stone, *Imér. Eg.* 16, to Leontopolis); *CRAI* 1874, 97.

² Cf. Riggsby, *GRBS* 19 (1978) 244–245 (n. 19 signaling the present study). The texts are now A. Bernard, *Les portes du désert*, Paris 1984, nos. 5–9.

Sidney 1987, 110.3; W. Horbury, D. Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt*, New York 1992, 125 (with photograph); A. Bernard, *Prose 23*; K. Rigsby, *Asyria*, Berkeley 1996, 228]. Plate p. 142.

8 βασιλίσσης καὶ βασι-
λέως προστάδων,
ἀντὶ τῆς προανακει-
μένης περὶ τῆς ἀναθέσε-
ως τῆς προσευχῆς πλά-
κῆς ἡ ὑπογεγραμμένη
ἐπιγραφὴν.

12 βασιλεὺς Πτολεμαῖος Εὐ-
εργέτης τὴν προσευχὴν
ᾄδον.
regina et
rex inser(un)t.

(Greek) By order of the queen and king: in place of the previously existing plaque concerning the dedication of the synagogue, let the following be inscribed: "King Ptolemy Euergetes (dedicated) the synagogue as an inviolable place."
(Latin) The queen and king have commanded.

A royal couple permit a Jewish community to reinscribe a benefaction of Ptolemy Euergetes, the foundation of a synagogue with the right of asylum. MOMMSEN was not just the only editor who saw this stone: his historical interpretation of it has stood largely intact for more than a century. He argued that while we cannot identify either the synagogue or the Ptolemy Euergetes (there were two), the royal couple, this queen and king, must be the famous Zenobia and Vaballath of Palmyra during the time when they controlled Egypt, around 270 A.D.

These are the three puzzles presented by this text: which Euergetes, which queen and king, which synagogue.³ I believe that all three puzzles can be solved; and the text will point to an incident which stands at a turning point in the history of the right of asylum.

First, the queen and king. MILLER had assumed a Ptolemaic couple of the late second century B.C. MOMMSEN's attribution to Zenobia and

Vaballath was based on three arguments: the script, he says, is evidently late imperial („evidenter labentis imp. Rom."), the chancery uses Latin as well as Greek, and the precedence which the queen has over the king betrays Zenobia and her son, but not a Ptolemaic couple.

Now in fact it might be possible to build on this identification; MOMMSEN probably was too sensible to try. First, Zenobia was said, in later Christian polemic, to be either Jewish or sympathetic to Judaism.⁴ Second, she was said to trace her descent from the Ptolemies, and is even believed to have used the name Cleopatra.⁵ If these things were true, we might not be surprised to find her renewing a Ptolemaic benefaction to a synagogue in a region newly under her control; and our inscription has been offered as support for these claims about Zenobia. For a number of reasons, however, we ought to be very surprised. MOMMSEN's attribution is so odd that its survival might be reckoned a case of authority outweighing the accumulating evidence and several protests (first from DESSAU, and an essential progress by JEAN BINGEN in 1982).⁶ The attribution has stripped the document as a whole of much significance, such that the remaining questions, which Euergetes and which synagogue, have attracted little interest.

4 F. Millar, *JRS* 61 (1971) 12-13, sets out the testimonia; he expresses skepticism, and cites our inscription with apparent unease.

5 For Ptolemaic descent we have only the *HA* (see J. Schwartz, *BonHistAntCol* 1984/5 [1987] 199: *Trig.Tyr.* 30.2 *se de Cleopatrarum Ptolemaeorumque gente iactaret*; and *Prob.* 9.5 *contra Palmyrenos pro Odemati et Cleopatrae partibus Aegyptum defendentes*, where the first is taken to be Vaballath. On the fictions in *HA Trig.Tyr.* see T. D. Barnes, *The Sources of the Historia Augusta*, Brussels 1978, 69, who however accepts its claim here about Zenobia. A. Stein, *Hermes* 58 (1923) 452-456, argued that Callinicus' „history of Alexandria dedicated to Cleopatra" (so the *Suda*: *FGHHist* 281 T 1a; an alleged passage, *F* 2, pertains to the Ptolemaic period) means in fact Zenobia; this has been widely accepted—so Jacoby; G. W. Bowersock, *BASP* 21 (1984) 31-32; B. Nakamura, *GRBS* 34 (1993) 146-147, all citing the present inscription.

6 When Wessely overlooked MommSEN's attribution and explained the bilingualism by vague „contacts" between Rome and the Ptolemies (*WS* 24 [1902] 100), Wilcken vigorously defended his teacher's attribution, repeating the three arguments (*ArchP* 2 [1903] 465, and again in the *Chrestomathie*). The three are repeated again by Gabba against the contrary view of Dessau. Dessau's retraction is at *ILS* III.2 (1916) p. CLXXI („not the Palmyrenes but a Ptolemaic mother and son, perhaps Cleopatra and Caesarion," comparing *OGIS* 742, their grant as simply „queen and king" to a synagogue). For a Ptolemaic date, with arguments as here but leaving open the other two questions: J. Bingen, in *Studia Paulo Naster II*, Louvain 1982, 11-16 (*Pages d'épigraphie*, Brussels 1991, 45-50); rejected by Bowersock (above, n. 5) 31-32, Nakamura (above, n. 5) 147 n. 63, on the grounds of the presence of Latin.

3 The questions are left open in the most recent citations known to me: L. H. Feldman and M. Reinhold, *Jewish Life and Thought among Greeks and Romans*, Minneapolis 1996, 48; Margaret H. Williams, *The Jews and the Greeks and Romans: A Diasporan Sourcebook*, Baltimore 1998, 87.

First, evidence for Jewish communities in Egypt in the third century A.D. is very slight, for reasons we know after the great Jewish war. So this inscription does not take its place among comparable documents or in a recognizable setting. As to Zenobia, her control of Egypt lasted less than 18 months;⁷ from her, apart from this stone we have no official document even among the papyri of Egypt (which far outnumber the inscriptions); what we do have is a few papyri which are simply dated by the regime—and these give the name of Vaballath, not Zenobia. The survival rate for acts of someone who came to be seen as a usurper does not seem to be high. This stone makes a strange exception. Moreover, in the few official references that we do have to the Palmyrene regime in documents (not just in Egypt but even at Palmyra), Zenobia is not mentioned: Vaballath, with his elaborate titles which are missing here, does have a colleague, but it is the emperor Aurelian, as we would expect. That is normal usage, whereas naming Zenobia, and especially naming her first, is not normal for the Palmyrenes. Finally, the regime of Zenobia probably saw themselves or represented themselves as legitimate Roman rulers;⁸ for them to revive a 400-year old Ptolemaic privilege for a Jewish synagogue, in the century after the Bar-Kochba war, ought to be a deliberate anti-Roman statement. None of this is likely.

Now in fairness to Mommsen, in 1881 he was not able to know very much about Greco-Roman Egypt; this was in fact six years before he sent forth *WILCKEN* to invent papyrology.⁹ Today these matters are not so obscure. First, palaeography: *MOMMSEN* had almost no dated inscriptions of Ptolemaic times to compare; now we have dozens. Of the many scholars who have printed this text, *MOMMSEN*, as noted, was the only one who had seen the stone;¹⁰ a photograph was not published until 1952 (in *CJ*). In brief: this blockish writing is most similar to writing of the first century

7 For reconstruction of the dates (late 270 to summer 272) see J. R. Rea, *P. Oxy.* XL (1972) pp. 15–26, cf. Millar (above, n. 4) 9 and 16 n. 164.

8 For the titulature and self-image of the Palmyrenes see Nakamura (above, n. 5) 143–148.

9 I have in mind the moving account in *UPL* I p. 1.

10 Stein (above, n. 5) 454 n. 2 invokes the script against Dessau's dating, noting Dittenberger's stress that the ligature of NA in line 3 shows a late date. They had not seen the stone, and in fact there are no ligatures. Lewis however knew the photograph in declaring Dessau's date „almost certainly excluded by the letter-forms,” but cited no comparanda.

B.C. in Egypt,¹¹ it is not the more monumental writing that characterizes later Imperial texts. This stone ought to derive from the end of the Hellenistic period.

Second, in 1881 there was no other Greek document that granted to a sacred place in Egypt the right of asylum, sacred immunity from the civil authorities. Across the generation after 1881, a dozen inscriptions granting this privilege were discovered. From these we know, as *MOMMSEN* could not, the chronological range and the historical context of such grants of the right of asylum. They do not occur randomly across one thousand years of Greco-Roman rule in Egypt: the earliest dates to 97 B.C., the latest to the 40's B.C. These inscriptions are a phenomenon of the end of the Ptolemaic state.¹² The Romans were made nervous by this immunity from the law and in Egypt at least they apparently did not allow it to spread. Here again, a revival of this privilege of asylum by Zenobia would be surprising, an anti-Roman gesture.

Finally, the sequence „queen and king”: here the record of the papyri from Egypt has been clear and consistent for more than 70 years and has not been changed by more recent discoveries. Zenobia and Vaballath, to repeat, did not call themselves „queen and king”. In the history of Egypt only two couples ever did this in official usage: Cleopatra III with her successive brothers, between 116 B.C. and 101 B.C., and the famous Cleopatra, the VIIIth, first with a brother in the 40's (this on very few testimonies) and then with her son by Caesar, Ptolemy called Caesarion, from 37 B.C. on (and that queen and king, as they are regularly called, are rather richly documented).¹³

Our queen and king therefore ought to be one of these late Ptolemaic couples, Cleopatra III or VII. Which one? *MOMMSEN* was right to be uneasy about a Hellenistic date for the appearance of Latin on our stone; and the Latin graffiti¹⁴ adduced by *BINGEN* have not persuaded everyone that we should expect bilingualism in Ptolemaic Egypt. This stele, however, is not carrying some private graffiti but a representation of an

11 Compare e.g. *IEgyptum* III 201 (95 B.C.), 166 (Augustan); *Imétr.Ég.* 43 (Augustan?) and Jewish); square sigmas e.g. in *CJ* 1454 (A.D. 5, from the Jewish cemetery at Leontopolis; E. Naville, *The Mound of the Jews*, London 1890, Pl. 4E). Other examples at Bingen (above, n. 6) 14–15.

12 Collected at Riggsby, *Asyria* pp. 540–573.

13 For chronological details see T. C. Skeat, *JEA* 48 (1962) 100–105; Linda M. Ricketts, *BASP* 16 (1979) 213–217. On Cleopatra and her brothers see L. Criscuolo, in *Egitto e storia antica*, Bologna 1989, 325–339.

14 A. Bernard, *De Thèbes à Syène* nos. 321, 323: 116/5 B.C.

act of the Ptolemaic government. Under which of the two Cleopatras is this Latin imprimatur likely to have been added to a royal edict? Surely, the later one, the last Cleopatra. Not, I imagine, because she might have regarded her son by Caesar as a Roman, although that is possible.¹⁵ In fact we cannot know whether these Latin words stem from the royal chancery and were written on the papyrus which this inscription copied, or were added on the stone by the synagogue authorities for reasons of their own. Either way, the implication is the same: these words put a Latin warning at the end of an act whose goal is not merely a private matter like protecting a runaway slave from a master, but the exclusion of government authorities from the sacred space, authorities who would be represented chiefly by the royal army and police and tax agents. (Whether the same mason wrote the Greek and the Latin is uncertain. But the man who wrote the Greek knew that the big Latin letters would follow, because he increasingly crowded his writing in order to leave space for them. The Greek and the Latin make a single statement.) That these Latin words are added most likely reflects the presence of Roman troops in Egypt—which means after the time of Caesar,¹⁶ and especially from 37 B.C. on.

ROSTOVITZEF believed that Egypt was being unaccountably well governed in its last Ptolemaic decade, and he guessed that this was because Roman soldiers were doing some of the governing.¹⁷ That guess has inspired cautionary doubts about lack of concrete evidence. This inscription would seem to be a good piece of evidence: some persons who, but for this right of asylum, would have had authority to interfere with this synagogue in behalf of the royal government, spoke and read Latin as their first language. I suggest that they were the troops of Antonius. Strictly speaking, the Latin is not informative: it would not tell a truly Greekless reader what to do.¹⁸ It seems to be intended as a warning that even Romans must pay heed to the Greek text.

15 See the remarks and references of J. Bingen at *Bull. épigr.* 1998, 552.

16 See E. Van't Dack, *JJP* 19 (1983) 77–86, and in *Das römisch-byzantinische Ägypten*, Mainz 1983, 19–29; A. Lajtar, *ZPE* 94 (1992) 213–216.

17 *SEHAW* 1551 n. 190 (cf. Stähelin, *RE* 11 [1921] 755, that the legions kept order in Cleopatra's absence in Rome, a common supposition); reservations at E. Will, *Histoire politique du monde hellénistique II*², Nancy 1982, 539. See generally Linda M. Ricketts, *The Administration of Ptolemaic Egypt under Cleopatra VII*, diss. Univ. Minnesota 1980.

18 We do not know how many Roman soldiers in Egypt could read Greek; Caesar complains that those stationed in Alexandria in 55 B.C. degenerated into local ways (qui iam in consuetudinem Alexandrinae vitae ac licentiae venerant), abandoning

Thus the stone dates to the 30's B.C.; the queen is Cleopatra, the king is little Caesaron. I think that this much is highly probable and little problematic. But which Ptolemy Euergetes and which synagogue? Of the two Ptolemies Euergetes, the second (145–116 B.C.) is somewhat nearer to the attested range of the extant inscriptions granting the right of asylum to temples in Egypt, than is the first (246–221 B.C.). That nearness in time probably should be of some value for the sake of consistency with the historical parallels; but in the end the date of our Euergetes would be meaningful only if this grant attributed to him is genuine, a question to which I return below.

So consider the recipient, the synagogue: where was this inscription intended to be placed? There were synagogues (called *συναγωγαί*, as here) in various parts of Egypt, as we know from the papyri, already in the third century B.C.¹⁹ In Greco-Roman Egypt, granting the right of asylum, immunity from the civil authorities, was a rare gesture: about a dozen such grants survive on inscriptions, in a land from which we have unparalleled documentation. This synagogue ought to have been of some importance; the surviving petitions for asylum (which otherwise are for pagan temples) say that the temple is "distinguished", "of first rank", "famous", "older than the rest", and so on. The fact that the stone is alabaster is not helpful; the alabaster quarries at Hatnub and elsewhere had been exploited since pharaonic times, and alabaster artifacts are found throughout Egypt.²⁰ What is more suggestive is that the inscription came to market in Cairo—rather than in Alexandria, which has always had its own antiquities market. That suggests that the inscription did not stand originally in the greatest synagogue of Alexandria.²¹ That is the city about which we might have thought first, in looking for a synagogue that could win this royal exemption. My suggestion therefore is that we look to the most famous

Roman discipline and taking wives and begetting children (BC 3.110; bibliography at Van't Dack, *Ägypten* 24 n. 73). On Latin in Egypt in Imperial times, especially in military contexts, see S. Davis, in: *Il bilinguismo degli antichi*, Genoa 1991, 47–81, and Van't Dack 25–27 for apparent Latinisms in Greek already under Cleopatra.

19 See J. G. Griffiths, *JThS* 38 (1987) 1–15 (= *Atlantis and Egypt*, Cardiff 1991, 99–113).

20 Cf. Porter-Moss, *Topographical Bibliography* IV 23; A. Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, Oxford 1961, 41. On the different varieties of stone in the little dedicatory plaques of Ptolemaic date see D. Thompson, *JJP* 23 (1993) 149–156.

21 Called by Philo *Γαί. 134 τῇ μεγίστῃ καὶ μεγιστοτάτῃ συναγωγῇ*.

synagogue in the Ptolemaic countryside: this was at the village of Leontopolis, about twenty miles north of Cairo.²²

More than geography and a process of elimination leads us to this place. We have good reason to think that the synagogue at Leontopolis was in fact dedicated by a Ptolemy Euergetes: the Second. It was founded for the Jewish community that had been established in Egypt by Euergetes' predecessor in the 160's B.C.; these were refugees from the Maccabean war against the Seleucids, the Ptolemies' traditional enemies, and from the dynastic struggles in Jerusalem that followed the war. Josephus has left us an extraordinary portrait of this event and of the building itself. It was designed to be a conscious rival, imitation, and surrogate for the temple in Jerusalem (4/ 13.62 ff.): Onias, son of the highpriest, had fled with his followers to Alexandria, where he entered upon a distinguished military career; eventually, "wanting to acquire eternal fame, he asked the king's permission to build a temple in Egypt similar to that in Jerusalem, appointing Levites and priests..." This, he says, will fulfill the prophecy at Isaiah 19:19; he invokes his own past military services to the Ptolemaic crown; he says the other Jews have shrines scattered about Egypt, contrary to orthodoxy; he will build one, in imitation of the one in Jerusalem, with the same dimensions, in honor of the king and his wife and children, to be the common place of worship for the Jews of Egypt. Josephus had given a brief description of the building itself at *Bj* 7.426ff. He also reports that it was ordered closed by Vespasian in A.D. 73, and we do not hear later of the Jews of Leontopolis. In 1908 PETRIE spent several weeks digging at the site; he thought that he found the synagogue, though this has been doubted.²³

The date of this petition from Onias is not stated by Josephus; and he does not say when the building was finally completed and dedicated.²⁴ But clearly the original petition was made only after much of Onias's career as a general of the Ptolemaic armies had been completed, well into the 150's at the earliest.²⁵ It would not be surprising if the building finally received

22 Cf. Lefebvre, *ASAE* 19 (1919) 38, "synagogue de Léontopolis (?)" claimed without argument by Calderini, *DizEggr* IV 653, *DizTopogr* III 188 (judged a fragile hypothesis by Bingen (above, n. 6) 16 n. 24). On Leontopolis see A. Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, Tübingen 1985, 119-135.

23 See R. de Vaux, *RB* 75 (1968) 205.

24 The text of *Bj* 7.436 has that to its closing in A.D. 73 the structure lasted 343 years, an impossible figure.

25 So also Tcherikover, *CPapJud* I p. 45. Onias' sons were appointed generals in the war against Lathyrus ca. 105 B.C. (Jos. *Aj* 13.285).

its dedication in the time of Euergetes, that is, after 145 B.C., fifteen years or more after the first arrival of the Jewish refugees in Egypt. It was under Euergetes that the book of 2nd Maccabees was composed, which in form is a letter from the Jews of Jerusalem to those of Egypt telling them about the war against the Seleucids.²⁶

There are two more reasons why we might suspect that if any Jewish synagogue in Egypt ever was granted the right of asylum, it would be the one at Leontopolis. First, the claim of this place to some status greater than an ordinary synagogue, and comparable to the temple in Jerusalem, was taken seriously by some of the rabbis in Roman times, and is reflected in their comments in the Talmud.²⁷ Second, the temple in Jerusalem, according to 1st Maccabees, had itself been granted the right of asylum by the Seleucid crown in the 150's B.C. We can see that privilege echoed here, if this is the building that claimed to be its surrogate in Egypt.

Attributing this stone to the synagogue at Leontopolis places it in a community about which we have some information. The Jews of Leontopolis were above all a military support for the Ptolemaic house: several of their leaders are found, from the first generation of their presence in Egypt, in the highest army positions. Repeatedly they became involved in the dynastic struggles that characterized the royal family in its final century, usually on the side of the queen. Toward the end of the second century B.C. an armed force of Jews from Leontopolis intervened in Alexandria and saved the throne for Cleopatra III (Jos. *C.4p.* 2.50-52). It is consistent with such a role that this community would be able to win a special favor from Cleopatra VII in the 30's, as her need for troops for the war against Octavian began to be evident.²⁸ I suggest that on this occasion they lent their aid, yet again, to the royal house, and in exchange obtained from the queen a renewal, so it seems, of the right of asylum for their synagogue.

So it seems: what then are we to think about the internal text, the quoted original grant by Ptolemy Euergetes? (Euergetes II, on this argument.) I offer four reasons for being suspicious. First, in the 140's B.C.,

26 1 Macc. 1.1, τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς τοῖς κατ' Ἀλγυντρον ἰουδαίοις. For the good relations between Euergetes and the Jews, which were obscured by later myth, see Tcherikover, *CPapJud*. I pp. 22-23; cf. E. S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism: the Reinvention of Jewish Tradition*, Berkeley 1998, especially 228-229.

27 Abodah Zarah 52b; Megillah 10a.

28 In 40 B.C., according to Jos. *Bj* 1.279, Cleopatra tried to recruit Herod as a general.

this would be by far the earliest surviving text that grants the right of asylum to a sacred place in Ptolemaic Egypt. Of course there must be a first; but is it likely to have been for a Jewish synagogue rather than some Egyptian temple? Second, among all the places declared inviolable that we know in the Hellenistic world at large (more than eighty), no other is for a newly-created sacred place, that is, as a part of the initial act of dedication.²⁹ Granted asylum seems usually to be given to an established and venerable shrine, as one would expect and as the grants often state. Third, unless I am mistaken, there is no Ptolemaic parallel for requesting royal permission to reinscribe a text. Of course the ancients sometimes replaced damaged inscriptions; in an example from among sacred laws, a priest on late Hellenistic Delos was ordered (by whom is not said) to replace a broken stele: *ἀπὸ τῆς καταγέλλουσας στήλης κατὰ πρόσταγμα ἀνέγραψε τὴν προγράψην*.³⁰ But it is difficult to imagine that if the old synagogue inscription was damaged, the Jews, instead of simply cutting a new one, first sent emissaries to Alexandria to ask permission to do so. We do not hear of such a gesture, and surely that is understandable: if a status or privilege is real and is functioning, then either the recipient or the grantor will have the written evidence for it and there would not be need to go back to the central government on the mere subject of a new inscription; the inscription after all was no more than a public transcribing of the official act that was on papyrus.

Fourth, the right of asylum of the temple in Jerusalem: I have argued that this grant to the synagogue presupposes and emulates that status of the Jerusalem temple itself. But we have good grounds for thinking that the right of asylum of the temple in Jerusalem was itself a literary fiction – a fiction which we can date approximately. In the book 1st Maccabees, written around 100 B.C., the claim is made that Jerusalem was declared sacred and inviolable (*ἄσυνος*) in 151 B.C. by the Seleucid king: he declares this in the course of a long letter granting many other fashionable privileges.³¹ Scholars have debated the authority of various documents that are alleged in Maccabees or Josephus concerning the privileges of the Jews. This is a question of individual cases, and accuracy of mechanical detail and vocabulary is no guarantee that the substance is true – we expect a forger to imitate real usage. In the case of this letter which bestows so many

privileges on Jerusalem and the temple, not even that much can be said. Few scholars have tried to defend this particular document in 1st Maccabees as a whole, although often one or another of the claims which it makes has been taken seriously. As to the title „sacred and inviolable“ which it grants Jerusalem, our evidence on the spread of the title through this part of the Mediterranean world is extremely good; it consists of this expression inscribed on coins which often are dated. The title spreads among the cities of Syria-Palestine during the late second century B.C. and the early first, contemporary with the growing competition of kings – rival Seleucids, Ptolemies, usurpers – vying for the good will and support of the cities in the region of Syria-Palestine. If the grant to Jerusalem in 151 B.C. were historical, this would be the earliest attested recognition beyond the old Greek cities of the Aegean – earlier than the asylum of great cities like Tyre (the first known outside the Aegean, in 141 B.C.), Seleucia in Pieria ca. 140, Ptolemais-Acco in 125, and others more numerous in the last 20 years of the second century and later. It is highly improbable that Jerusalem and Yahweh, the least hellenized of the important cities and cults of the region,³² would obtain this Greek privilege at so early a date as claimed, in 151 B.C. – if in fact it ever obtained it. Finally, the author of Maccabees tells us that the Jews in fact refused the privileges which the Seleucid king offered. I would conclude that this reported royal letter is a patriotic fiction, which was composed after the time (after the last years of the second century B.C.) when the right of asylum for cities had acquired its vogue in this region, and when its role as a bribe in the kings' struggles for the loyalty of cities was common enough knowledge for this privilege to be made into an item of literary propaganda.

That is to say: when in the 140's, Ptolemy Evergetes in Egypt dedicated the synagogue at Leontopolis, the temple of Jerusalem had not obtained the right of asylum (nor had any other place outside the Aegean); the literary claim that Jerusalem had been so honored was invented in the next generation. This claim probably became known to the Jews of Leontopolis with the circulation of the text of 1st Maccabees in Egypt, in the course of the first century B.C. Their own claim of the right of asylum for their synagogue at Leontopolis completed their traditional portrait of their place as a replica of the temple in Jerusalem, which, they now could read, had been declared an asylum by the Seleucid crown in the time of the Maccabees.

²⁹ A possible exception, and similar to the inscription in question here, is *Asylia* no. 236.

³⁰ *IDélos* VI 2529.8–11; cf. *TAM* V.1 239, 596.

³¹ 1 Macc. 10.31; cf. Rigsby, *Asylia* pp. 527–531.

³² See F. Millar, *JIS* 29 (1978) 1–21, on the unhellenized character of the Jews before the 160's B.C.

If this is so, the Jews of Leontopolis possessed no document that demonstrated Euergetes' grant of asylum to the synagogue; and indeed in practice this right had not existed, because otherwise there would be no need to petition Cleopatra concerning a mere inscription. They approached her with the claim that nevertheless the right of asylum was valid, was Euergetes' intention; and apparently they claimed that once there had been a dedicatory plaque that said so, which now ought to be restored and respected. In effect, this is a new grant by Cleopatra, which masquerades as a confirmation.

Here then is our event: in the 30's B.C. the Jews of Leontopolis found it possible to seek official ratification of a tradition that had grown up concerning their synagogue, one part of the lore which put it on an equal footing with the temple in Jerusalem: that Euergetes, when he dedicated the synagogue, granted it the right of asylum. Cleopatra, for her part, found it expedient to give her stamp of approval, by allowing this inscription, to a privilege for which she had no documentary evidence. It is not difficult to understand her interest in the matter. The relationship between Leontopolis and the crown was above all military. The Jews had been allowed into Egypt to be a thorn in the Seleucid side; their leaders commanded Ptolemaic armies; they had helped the royal family through several crises in Alexandria. These were troops who could be relied upon—in contrast to many others in Egypt. The circumstance in which the Jews might calculate, rightly, that they could gain this concession from Cleopatra was her need for troops as the war of Actium approached.

So we can see in this inscription the result of a diplomatic success. We can at least speculate about the aftermath; here I would invoke the searing pages of HANNAH ARENDT on what she called the "political naivete" of the Jews of Europe in the 19th century, when they cooperated with the emerging national governments in the hope of protection against their neighbors.³³

What was the right of asylum worth to the Jews of Leontopolis? That is, what did they want with it; and in the long run, what did they get? But first we must ask HANNAH ARENDT'S question: What is the favor of a doomed monarch worth?

The Ptolemaic state slowly came to ruin, in part, because of its growing inability to control its own chief creation, the class of Greeks and Hellenized Egyptians whom we call bureaucrats. These bureaucrats did not

spend much time in a bureau, and in particular they never drew a salary. They evolved into a local elite, who combined governmental duties with social and economic dominance of the villages in their sphere.³⁴ And increasingly, the village elite did not like interference from the central government. As the second and first centuries progressed, these people became increasingly entrenched, following their own interests. From Alexandria flow the ineffective letters issuing threats to officials that they will be summoned down river to answer for their inaction or malfeasance. In Alexandria, constitutionalism reigned; in the villages, prosopography ran rampant. This is the context in which the right of asylum was granted to some of the temples of Egypt.

It is one of the outstanding problems of the history of Egypt to explain how the Romans got the administration to operate effectively once more. That they did so is certain. How did they put the Ptolemaic village dignitaries to work again? Roman attitudes to the right of asylum may form a part of that story.

We might describe Ptolemaic rule as a slow transition from a colonial elite of conquerors to a social and economic elite of deeply-rooted and widely-connected locals. On this vocabulary, the establishment of Jewish refugees at Leontopolis in the 160's was a royal attempt to recreate, in small part, the original situation, a well-armed and well-disciplined ethnically distinct group who, unlike others in Egypt now, owed their position exclusively to the house of the Ptolemies.³⁵ But to establish such an elite amid conquered Egyptians in 300 B.C. is one thing; to do so in 160 B.C. amid a Greek and Hellenized ruling elite who had firm expectations about their traditional privileges—that is perhaps another matter. I am suggesting that the Jews of Leontopolis had reason to fear their neighbors, and their neighbors included local agents of the royal government.

We see then a grant of asylum at a crucial moment in the history of this phenomenon. The right of asylum would serve to protect the synagogue from local officials and their friends; it gave the Jews of Leontopolis direct access to the crown in matters of the state's legal demands. The rulers who would soon succeed the Ptolemies were far more suspicious of this immunity from the law, and they had little need to win supporters by means of such special guarantees. They certainly had no reason to continue or enforce this Ptolemaic decision.

³⁴ See especially Rostovtzeff, *SEHWW* II 896 ff.; J. Bingen, in *Acti XVII Congr. Papyr.* III (1984) 921–937.

³⁵ Cf. Tcherikover, *C. Pap. Jud.* I pp. 20–21.

³³ I mean the famous second chapter of *Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York 1968, 11–53.

If I am right about this stone, in the 30's B.C. the Jews of Leontopolis, not for the first time, ostentatiously cast their lot with the royal house, and gained in exchange a favor for their synagogue, the right of asylum. This success, I suggest, did not win the Jews any friends in local society. Upon the collapse of the royal house after Actium, it need not have been the Romans who felt that they had a score to settle with the Jews of Leontopolis. In 1886 NAVILLE found the graveyard of the village, of the 80 gravestones discovered there (*CJ* II 1451-1530), an unnaturally large percentage seem to date in the reign of Augustus. And in A.D. 73, the synagogue was closed.

What, in the end, followed upon royal favor and the right of asylum for the Jews of Leontopolis? Hope, isolation, hostility, and ultimately destruction.

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