Waters of the Exodus: Jewish Experiences with Water in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department for the Study of Religion
University of Toronto

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2016

Abstract

This study examines how the fluvial environment shaped the writing of Jewish narratives in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt (300 BCE – 115 CE). It focuses on four texts that narrate the Exodus story and analyzes them in terms of how water in Egypt is described and how elements of the environment—such as the Nile or the Red Sea—are characterized in their retellings. I argue that the natural environment informed Jewish writings through the incorporation of new fluvial terminology, development of different conceptions of water, and the adoption of positive attitudes towards the environment. These features, found specifically in texts composed in Egypt, demonstrate the power of the environment to shape a foundational Jewish narrative.

Previous studies on the Jews of Egypt have examined their lives in political, social, or economic terms, with little acknowledgement of the physical environment and its role in daily and religious life. By focusing on water, this work traces the emergence of distinct practices developed in response to the environment, such as the location of places of worship and emerging employment opportunities. Such characteristics distinguish the communities of Egypt from both other Jews and non-Jews. Additionally, the project speaks to larger trends in the field of Biblical Studies that focus on the materiality of everyday life.
Acknowledgments

This project would not have come together without the help of many individuals who have supported me and offered critical feedback along the way. My committee members, Judith Newman, Katherine Blouin, and John Marshall have been an incredible team helping me frame and re-frame my project from its earliest beginnings to its final draft. Judith encouraged and challenged me to continually refine my thinking about Judaism in Egypt and she read multiple articulations of the project. Katherine inspired me to think critically about water and its impact on ancient cultures. This project began in a course on water in Egypt taken with Katherine in the first year of my PhD and she has subsequently pushed me to think in new ways about how water figured into Jewish life in Egypt. John has always given me practical advice on balancing writing and teaching and has asked me thought-provoking questions about my project challenging me to articulate my understanding of Judaism in different ways.

Various faculty and staff in the Department for the Study of Religion (DSR) have also helped me immensely in developing this project: John Kloppenborg, Jennifer Harris, Colleen Shantz, and Kyle Smith. As the chair of the DSR John has given me career advice and opportunities to be involved in the academic life of the department. I am greatly appreciative of all the help from Jennifer who gave me insights on everything from interviews to defense details. Colleen who responded to a section of my project presented at a DSR colloquium last January. Her feedback was fundamental in how I framed my research, in particular my thinking about the term ‘experience.’ Also, Kyle who helped me with framing my research to non-specialists. He gave me advice that was helpful in particular for writing my introduction and abstract. Staff members at the DSR also helped me in numourous ways. Fereshteh Hashemi regularly brought new lectures or events on the topic of water to my attention and helped schedule the defense. Marilyn Colaço has always been a friendly face and helped me navigate my teaching responsibilities while writing. Also, Irene Kao who was there to help me with financial questions as well as to to chat with me about mental and physical health.

I would also like to thank my friends and colleagues for reading different sections of this project. Specifically to Amy Marie Fisher, Ian Brown, Rebecca Bartel, Youcef Soufi, and Aldea Mulhern for their feedback on the earliest articulation of my methodology in our dissertation reading group. Caroline Cormier gave me insightful comments on my introduction and critical
feedback on the use of place theory in the project. My colleagues at NMC, John Screnock and Jonathan Vroom, who read parts of this work and helped me with articulating a hero narrative within my writing. I am grateful to Emily Springgay for reading through the entire project and raising questions and issues with clarity that were helpful for finalizing the complete draft. In addition she created the maps in the project.

I would also like to acknowledge several scholars outside of the University of Toronto that have assisted me throughout this process. Hindy Najman originally encouraged me to pursue an M.A. when we met during my undergraduate degree. I am thankful for her presenting me with many opportunities to meet excellent scholars and learn the ropes of the Academy. René Bloch read an early chapter from this study and helped me situate my research more squarely in Egypt. Lastly, Rodney Werline has also been incredibly motivational in helping me realize the value of this work and to refine my thinking about embodiment and experiences.

I would also like to thank my students from RLG404 Summer 2015, a course that I taught while I was finishing my first complete draft of this project. As they were writing a 20-page paper (many for the first time) I was completing this manuscript. They consistently inspired me and kept me accountable for my goal of completing the draft before the conclusion of the course.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their constant support for the many years that I have been in school. My sister Nicole who listened and supported me throughout this process. My parents for their unconditional love and who encouraged me to keep going and to always do my best. Also, to my mother-in-law for her determined spirit who inspired me to get it done. Last but not least, to my husband and partner Dave for helping me throughout my academic career and encouraging me to always strive for excellence. I could not have done this without his constant support.
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Introduction

Despite the many differences between antiquity and the present, the centrality of water in daily life, both sweet and salty, has not changed. Even though we now have more complex technology for accessing and distributing water, the practices of obtaining and disseminating resources remains as important today as in the past. For those living in the vicinity of the Mediterranean Sea in antiquity, water was essential, used for everything from irrigation to bathing. Elaborate systems, such as aqueducts and channels, were constructed to transport it from one place to another and storage facilities, such as cisterns, enabled water to be held in reserve in anticipation of future shortages. Water was also central to ancient cosmologies and used in cultic ceremonies. Deities were commonly associated with different bodies of water and cults performed rituals that involved water, such as ablutions for purification.¹

In the ancient world, oftentimes both mundane and cultic practices developed in response to regional engagements with particular environments.² In Palestine, for example, rainwater was the prevalent source for water. This resulted in a cosmology that focused on deities living in the sky and irrigation practices focused on storing water during the rainy season.³ In contrast, due to the lack of rainfall in Egypt, Egyptian deities (e.g. Osiris, Isis, Thoth, Hapy) were regularly associated with the Nile and its annual flood. Rather than look to the sky, they created extensive canal systems to transport the floodwater to irrigate the crops. For both the inhabitants of

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¹ Some examples of deities associated with water include the Egyptian goddess Isis who was connected with the flooding of the Nile and was thought to bring a successful crop, the Egyptian god Osiris who was also connected to the Nile flood and agricultural produce, and the Greek god Poseidon who controlled the oceans, rivers, storms, and seas, and to whom sailors prayed for safe journeys.


³ It is noteworthy that rain appears frequently in the Hebrew Bible. The flood in Gen 6 comes by way of rain, and a lack of rain appears in several prophetic texts. For more on the development of these cosmologies see Yi-fu Tuan, Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974).
Palestine and Egypt, the hydric environment played a significant role in shaping their perspective on the world and their placement within it.4

Building on the premise that there is a relationship between people and their physical hydric setting, this study will investigate how the unique fluvial environment of Egypt5 shaped the lives of Jews living in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt.6 The Nile dominated the landscape of Egypt and served as the primary source of fresh water for the inhabitants. Contrary to other rivers, the Nile flooded predictably once per year, and its water was carefully distributed to ensure agricultural production. While water has been studied extensively in connection with the Egyptians and the Greeks in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt,7 little research has been undertaken on

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4 Geographers have theorized “Place” to understand this relationship between the environment and people. See for example Tim Cresswell, Place: An Introduction (2d edition. Chichester, West Sussex. Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015); Tuan, Topophilia, 85–91.

5 The ‘fluvial environment’ refers to places that are characterized by running water, such as meandering rivers and streams. Egypt is dominated by the Nile River as well as various streams and canals that are connected to the Nile. For a discussion on the fluvial environment of Egypt, see Rushdie Said, The River Nile: Geology, Hydrology and Utilization (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1993).

6 I have decided to adopt the terminology of Jew/Jewish throughout this dissertation. Several scholars have identified problems with this terminology, as addressed by several scholars such as Mason, Miller, and Cohen. Nevertheless, since the definition of Ioudaios is not primarily the focus of this dissertation, I have aimed for consistent language. Moreover, not all scholars are in agreement that the term Jew/Jewish should not be used. For a recent critique of the growing tendency to use Judean instead of Jew see Adele Reinhartz, “The Vanishing Jews of Antiquity,” Marginalia: LA Review of Books, June 24, 2014, accessed Jan 11, 2016, http://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/vanishing-jews-antiquity-adele-reinhartz/. The challenges of translating Ioudaios and the disconnect between modern notions of religion with ancient conceptions of an ethnic group have been provided in the following sources: David M. Miller, “The Meaning of Ioudaios and its Relationship to Other Group Labels in Ancient ‘Judaism,’” Currents in Biblical Research 9.1 (2010): 98–126; Steve Mason, “Jews, Judeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History,” in Josephus, Judea, and Christian Origins: Methods and Categories (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc, 2009), 141–84; Shaye J. D. Cohen, “Ioudaios, Iudaeus, Judaean, Jew,” in The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 69–106. An unpublished paper by Sylvie Honigman offers another way to look at the terminology debate specifically in Egypt. She suggests that “Judean” is the more accurate term to use in the Ptolemaic period. However, over time their status changed and they came to see themselves more as a religious group than an ethnic group. Her concluding sentence is poignant, “between 41 and 116 CE, the Judeans had gradually become Jews” (“The Ptolemaic and Roman Definitions of Social Categories and the Evolution of Judean Communal Identity in Egypt,” in Jewish and Christian Communal Identities in Antiquity [ed. Yair Furstenberg; Leiden: Brill, forthcoming]).

7 In recent decades, scholars working in the fields of Classics and Egyptology have examined how water shaped the lives of the inhabitants of Egypt. This research has illuminated the distinctiveness of the environment of Egypt and its influence upon religion, culture, and politics. For ancient Egyptians, the Nile was considered sacred and its temples stored, used, and measured the floodwaters. There were also deep connections between the Egyptian pantheon and the river. Nearly every Egyptian deity was associated with its flood, at least at one point in time. For Egyptians, the river’s water was (and still is) not only a natural resource, but also a deep part of their identity; it informed their calendar, festivals, and foundational narratives. Following Alexander’s conquest of Egypt in 331
how this particular fluvial environment shaped Jewish life, despite the large number of Jews who migrated to Egypt under Ptolemaic and Roman rule. Studies on the Jews of Egypt have instead focused on Jewish life in terms of their religious practices, or their social and political identities, without an in-depth study on the role of water in these aspects of their lives. The only exception to this are studies on the hypothetical use of miqva’ot in Egypt, an assumption based on the presence of ritual baths in Palestine. However, to date there is no material evidence for these structures in Egypt.

BCE, the new immigrant Greek population adapted to this environment, developing new agricultural and religious practices, often borrowed from Egyptian traditions. They built temples alongside the river (as practiced by the Egyptians for centuries) and developed cults and deities in connection with the inundation (Serapis and Neilos). For these new migrants, the Nile became a central part of their daily and religious lives and identities, in a similar way as it had been for the Egyptians.


According to the Letter of Aristeas 100,000 Jews were deported to Egypt, among them 30,000 troops were permitted by Ptolemy 1 to settle in Egypt (Let. Aris. 13). These figures are likely exaggerated as are later ones offered by Philo who spoke of one million Jews living in first century CE Alexandria. According to Diana Delia the numbers for first century Alexandria were likely closer to 180,000 Jews, roughly a third of the population of Alexandria at the time. Therefore it is difficult to imagine the numbers of Aristeas being accurate in this earlier period. Diana Delia, “The Population of Roman Alexandria,” Transactions of the American Philological Association 118 (1988): 275–92, here 288.


In his dissertation on Jewish ritual baths, Ronny Reich identified 286 potential Jewish ritual baths in the land of Israel dated to the Second Temple period. While his findings are debated, his study supports the popular belief that there was a boom in the construction of miqva’ot in the Second Temple period, approximately from the third century BCE to 70 CE. This argument largely rests on the lack of miqva’ot found prior to the third century BCE and the
Despite the paucity of research on the Jews and water in Egypt, there is a large amount of documentary and textual source material that demonstrates how the Jews both understood and engaged with the fluvial environment. Papyri attest to Jews sharing water with non-Jews (C.Pap.Jud. II 432), locating their places of worship along the Nile (C.Pap.Jud. I 134), and engaging in the transportation of goods along the river (C.Pap.Jud. III 469; III 518b). Other papyri reveal the presence of Jewish communities living along the Nile and its tributaries, such as Oxyryynchos and Edfu. Furthermore, literary texts composed in Egypt contain many references to the natural environment of Egypt, much more so than we find in writings composed elsewhere. For example, Philo of Alexandria’s Life of Moses describes the Nile’s flood cycle and the weather in Egypt; features that we do not find in other Jewish texts. This body of evidence demonstrates that the Jews of Egypt adapted to the local landscape as it became a central part of their lives.

This study explores the relationship between the Jews and the fluvial environment of Egypt through a comparative reading of four Jewish exodus narratives composed in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt: Artapanus’ On the Jews, Ezekiel the Tragedian’s Exagoge, Wisdom of Solomon, and Philo of Alexandria’s Life of Moses. Each of these texts uses contemporary terminology and understandings of water in Egypt to describe its major narrative events (e.g. Moses’ birth, ten plagues, crossing the Sea of Reeds). By comparing the same narrative we can

marked decrease of their presence post 70 CE. Ronny Reich, “Miqva’ot in Eretz Israel in Second Temple and the Mishah and Talmud Periods” (Ph. D. diss., Hebrew University, 1990).


12 SB XXVI 16652.

13 P. Tebt. I 86 R.

14 P. Princ. II 73; SB VI 9087.


16 When discussing the book of Exodus I have used a capital E, whereas for a more generic discussion of the narrative I have not capitalized the word (cf. exodus). This is to clearly distinguish the two from one another.
see the different ways in which Jewish authors understood the environment and used this knowledge to construct their compositions in a way that spoke to their audience. In these writings, we can see that the Jewish authors developed new understandings of the environment of Egypt, which stemmed from their experiences living in the land. Specifically in the exodus narratives, these ideas are reflected in new perspectives towards the environment of Egypt (chapter 3), the development of new concepts about water (chapter 4), and the adoption of fluvial terminology specific to Egypt (chapter 5). These changes demonstrate the engagements of Jews within the land of Egypt and how they adapted to life in the diaspora.

Therefore, I assert that the physical hydric environment was foundational in the lives of Egyptian Jews and that its study contributes to our understanding of the formation of Egyptian Judaism. By bringing this neglected subject to light, I demonstrate that the Jews of Egypt were deeply connected to the land. Instead of viewing these communities through an exilic lens, which sometimes over-emphasizes a longing for return to Palestine, this study highlights the Egyptian aspect of their identity, as tied to their physical context. By viewing Jews in relation to their environment, this project suggests a new approach to the study of ancient Judaism, namely the Jewish connection with the environment of Egypt. Finally, it provides a further examination into how the Jews lived and thrived in the diaspora amongst other cultural groups for nearly four hundred years.

An Overview of the Study of Judaism in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt

Only a handful of monographs in the past century have offered a comprehensive overview of Judaism in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt. Historically, scholars have emphasized the relationship between Jews and non-Jews, in particular comparing their social status and the level to which they assimilated with their cultural neighbours,\(^\text{17}\) with little regard to how they adapted to their new surroundings. A brief overview of scholarship on the study of Judaism in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt will demonstrate the significant contributions made in this field and will show how this current project builds upon previous studies to offer new insights into these communities.

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\(^{17}\) For a discussion of assimilation, see Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora.*
An early scholar on this subject was Victor Tcherikover. After working as a historian focusing on Judaism in the Hellenistic period, he published *The Jews in Egypt in the Hellenistic-Roman Age in the Light of Papyri* in 1945.18 This work was the first of its kind to incorporate the papyri into the discussion of Judaism in Egypt. It was only in working on this project that he realized that there needed to be a comprehensive system for accessing the papyri dealing with Jews in Egypt. He started working on *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum* with the help of Alexander Fuks, David M. Lewis, and Menahem Stern.19 This compendium of sources has remained an essential resource for any study on Judaism in Egypt as it sought to compile all possible documentary references to Jews in Egyptian papyri.20 Stemming from his research, he made several claims about the nature of Egyptian Judaism, such as the idea that the status of the Jews shifted dramatically in the early Roman period.21

Building on the work of Tcherikover, and providing some necessary updates, Aryeh Kasher’s 1985 volume analyzes the relationships between Jews and non-Jews living in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt. His study provides a new interpretation of the question of Jewish rights. Kasher argues that the Jewish Politeuma was equal in status to the Greek *polis*, emphasizing the Jewish nature of the Egyptian Jewish communities.22 His book is based on his dissertation research where he presents a view of Judaism in Egypt that emphasizes the *Jewish* nature of these communities, in opposition to Tcherikover’s focus on the *polis*.23 The book

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19 Tcherikover, Fuks, Lewis, and Stern, eds., *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum* I–III.

20 The decision on what should be included in this volume has been criticized. Determinations of what is Jewish/non-Jewish are often made based on names or references in the texts. Also, *C.Pap.Jud.* volumes I–III did not include any literary texts, which will be a starting point for the fourth volume that is being led by Tal Ilan among others.


22 Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, ix.

23 Martin Goodman, review of *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt: The Struggle for Equal Rights*, by Aryeh Kasher, *JJS* 32 n. 2 (1981): 207–8. Kasher’s interest in highlighting the role of the Politeuma may have stemmed from his life in Israel where he grew up. Political events in the 1960s and 1970s and in particular his involvement in the war may have shaped his reading of the evidence from Egypt about Judaism.
emphasizes the political and social status of the Jews and situates them amongst their cultural neighbours.\textsuperscript{24}

In contrast to the political focus of Kasher’s volume, Joseph Modrzejewski published in 1995 an overview of Egyptian Jewry.\textsuperscript{25} His book covers Jewish life in Egypt from the period of the composition of the book of Exodus (1500–1200 BCE) to the aftermaths of Jewish revolt of 115–117 CE. Rather than focusing on political events, he highlights information on the everyday lives of the poorer and less represented members of the community through the incorporation of multiple papyrological sources, emphasizing the social history of the Jews. The overall picture he offers is that of a flourishing Jewish diasporic community under the Ptolemies, but also that of increasing tension and struggle throughout the Roman period.

In addition to these monographs, which offer a broad overview of Jewish life, several studies have focused on specific events or texts produced in Egypt. The Alexandrian-Jewish conflicts of 37–41 CE\textsuperscript{26} and the Jewish revolts of 115–117 CE\textsuperscript{27} have been important moments that have been studied intensively for what they reveal about the relationships between Jews and non-Jews. Despite our limited knowledge of these events, the nature of these conflicts often shapes our perceptions of life in Egypt for all diasporic Jews. Yet, as Erich Gruen has argued, the overall experiences of the Jews living in Egypt should not be determined solely on these particular periods of crisis, instead most of their experiences tended to be positive.\textsuperscript{28} He suggests that these periods of tension be viewed as particular moments in time instead of seeing them as representative of all periods of Hellenistic and Roman rule in Egypt.

\textsuperscript{24} Additionally, this book offers an overview of Jewish evidence that is organized geographically. While the aim is political, he similarly arranges his study according to specific locations.

\textsuperscript{25} Modrzejewski, \textit{The Jews of Egypt}.


\textsuperscript{28} Gruen’s perspective is articulated in \textit{Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). However, his arguments are not universally accepted.
Studies of specific texts and ancient authors have also been fruitful for understanding life in Egypt. While the majority of our literary sources are assumed to have been composed in Alexandria, the texts nevertheless offer insights about Judaism in Egypt more broadly. Recently, the nature of the LXX and its translation has become a significant area of research. As Sylvie Honigman (2003) and Tessa Rajak (2009) demonstrate, the LXX was written in a particular Jewish context, informed by Greek culture. It is within this context that both the text itself and the myths surrounding its translation (e.g. Letter of Aristeas) must be understood. In addition to the LXX, interest in other texts composed in Egypt has recently piqued the attention of scholars. Benjamin G. Wright’s commentary of the Letter of Aristeas, the only one of its kind, is exemplary of this interest. Moreover, some of the lesser known works such as Artapanus’ On the Jews and Ezekiel the Tragedian’s Exagoge have been the topic of Society of Biblical Literature panels and have been brought more into discussions of Hellenistic Judaism. The focus on understanding these texts as products of Jewish-Ptolemaic Egypt has shown the diversity of Judaism at the time. Furthermore, Philo of Alexandria has received a great deal of scholarly attention for his writings that shed light on Jewish life in Alexandria and the Wisdom of Solomon is similarly read for its insights into Jewish views towards Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans. These studies each contribute to larger discussions of the identity of the Egyptian Jewish communities, their adoption of Hellenism, and the interactions between cultures in Egypt.


31 In 2008, the SBL section on Hellenistic Judaism devoted a panel to papers on Artapanus, and another to other Greek Jewish authors. In 2014, the same section organized a panel on Jews and the stage, encouraging submissions dealing with Ezekiel’s writings or other aspects of Jews and performance.


Whether comprehensive overviews of life in Egypt or an analysis of a specific text or event, these studies have all been informed by discussions on the interconnectivity of Judaism and Hellenism. While the book of 1 Maccabees suggests it was easy to distinguish between Judaism and Hellenism, in reality it was far more complicated. As scholarship has repeatedly shown, Hellenism was an all-pervasive and multifarious force that encompassed all aspects of life; there was no area of the Mediterranean that was not affected in some way by this cultural change.\(^{34}\) The exact relationship between these forces continues to be negotiated, often couched in terms of Jewish identity.

Studies of diasporic Jews have repeatedly focused on the issue of cultural assimilation. Some scholars have studied how Jews lived alongside their cultural neighbours, adopting certain practices and beliefs, but at the same time maintaining their own traditions. Louis H. Feldman’s monograph in 1993 traces the interactions between Jews and Greeks from their earliest encounters to the Roman period.\(^{35}\) While not specifically looking at Egypt, topics such as anti-Jewish prejudices, the promotion of the antiquity of the Jews, and proselytism remain topics that speak to Jewish communities in Egypt. Other writings have addressed the question of diaspora, and Hellenistic and Roman influences.\(^{36}\) The work of John Barclay has even offered a language for categorizing the ways that Jews engaged with non-Jews by clarifying what we mean by assimilation, acculturation, and accommodation.\(^{37}\) While not focused exclusively on the Jews of Egypt, these studies, among others, have helped shaped the discussion about Jewish communities in Egypt. The relationship between the Jews and the Romans has been explored primarily

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\(^{37}\) Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*. His study is unique for its presentation of theoretical models: 1. Assimilation = social integration (frequency of interaction with non-Jews and the quality of those interactions), 2. Acculturation = linguistic, educational, and ideological aspects of a given cultural matrix (level of familiarity with Greek literature, rhetoric, philosophy, and theology), 3. Accommodation = the degree to which they employed their acculturated knowledge (two possible directions, integrative or oppositional).
through close engagements with Philo’s writings. For example, Maren Niehoff’s monograph on Philo and Jewish identity explores how influential Rome was in the formation of Jewish identity in the writings of Philo.\(^{38}\) She demonstrates that Philo negotiated not two but three different traditions: Jewish, Greek, and Roman. Her study offers a focused analysis on how Philo identified with his Roman Alexandrian context and sheds light on the negotiation of identity politics for Jews living in the Roman period.

In contrast to the many books addressing the Hellenistic influence on the Jews, few have looked at how the Egyptian context shaped them. The reason for this bias towards Greco-Roman influences could reflect what Edward Said called Orientalism whereby the Orient (East) is seen in contrast to the Occident (West). The interests in the study of Early Judaism have tended to reflect a greater interest in the study of traditional “Western” history, which would focus more on the Hellenistic and Roman influences.\(^{39}\) The Egyptians, by contrast, were viewed as less powerful “Orientals” and, as a result, less influential. However, several scholars have discussed the important role that Egyptian culture has played in shaping Jewish life in Egypt. In a notable study by Gwyn Griffiths on the origins of synagogues in Egypt, this bias in scholarship is addressed.\(^{40}\) In contrast to the Babylonian or Jerusalem origin theory, he argues that the

\(^{38}\) Niehoff, *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture*.

\(^{39}\) On the topic of Eurocentrism, see the work of Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979). According to Said in *Orientalism*, the term, Orientalism, has three interdependent definitions. First, in the academic tradition, it refers to one who studies the Orient. Second, it offers a binary distinction between the Orient and the Occident, or East versus West. Lastly, Orientalism is a corporate institution for engaging with the Orient (*Orientalism*, 5). He also argues that the Orient and Occident are constructions but that they are deeply connected with power. The aim of *Orientalism* is thus to eliminate the categories of the Orient and Occident by shedding light on the different representations that are often passively passed by culture, institutions, or scholarship. His later work, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), offered a closer examination into culture and imperialism that looked beyond the limits of the Middle East. The book is posited as a sequel as it engages with the themes of imperial culture and resistance against empire.

The topic of Jews and Orientalism has also been studied. See for instance Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar, ed., *Orientalism and the Jews* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2005). In their introduction, Kalmar and Penslar explain that historically Jews have been viewed in the West as both oriental and occidental. Moreover, they emphasize the role of Christianity in the development of modern imperialist or western doctrine, which has been foundational in western understandings of Jews.

\(^{40}\) The main support he uses to demonstrate Egyptian influence is the Per Ankh (“House of Life”) institution that was connected to the temple but also served as a library and a place for special rites (including reading and copying texts). This Egyptian institution seems to encapsulate many of the features found in early Jewish synagogues. For example, Ben Sira and Josephus mention the synagogue as a place of learning and worship. In such a way, Griffith sees synagogues as serving a variety of functions (in a similar manner as the Egyptian places of worship held a
synagogues (proseuchai) in Egypt shared many similarities to Egyptian temples and that, thus, their origins could be traced to Egypt. By showing the similarities between Egyptian places of worship and the early Jewish synagogues, the article counters several assumptions about the nature of the Jews in Egypt, mainly their derivative and secondary status to the formation of Judaism. The work of Sylvie Honigman has also illuminated the Egyptian context of the Jews living in Egypt. In her “Jewish Communities of Hellenistic Egypt,” she situates different Jewish groups in their particular cultural context. The Jews in Edfu, for example, lived mostly alongside Egyptians, as we can see through surviving documentary evidence. By offering in-depth studies into several different communities, she situates the Jews alongside their Egyptian, Greek, and Roman neighbours.

In the present study on the Jews of Egypt, I am indebted to the above scholarly discussions focused on Judaism in the Second Temple period. My desire to situate Jewish communities of Egypt in an Egyptian, Greek and Roman cultural landscape is indicative of the legacy of such scholarship and appears throughout this project. We cannot study the Jews as isolated or insular communities, but rather as part of larger cultural and social movements happening throughout the Mediterranean context. It is also important to be critical of the ethnic or religious labels we impose on the texts based on their compositional setting, such as Jewish or variety of names), and that their architecture was often influenced more locally which can account for the diversity between different synagogues during this period. J. Gwyn Griffiths, “Egypt and the Rise of the Synagogue,” in Ancient Synagogues: Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery. Vol. 1 (ed. D. Urman and P. Flesher; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 3–16.


42 Similar studies have addressed the influence of Egyptian religious practices on Christian rituals and imagery. Vincent Rondot has presented the iconography of deities found in the Fayum between the second and third centuries CE. His study shows that there is more to these paintings than showing a Hellenistic presence in Egypt, rather they engage deeply with the Egyptian motifs and demonstrate the profound influence that Egypt and Egyptian cult in particular had on Greco-Roman artistic representations. (Derniers visages des dieux d’Égypte: Iconographies, panthéon et cultes dans le Fayoum hellénisé des IIe-IIIe siècles de notre ère [Paris: Éditions du Louvre, 2013].) Moreover, a collection edited by Jaś Elsner and Ian Rutherford explores the importance of pilgrimage from a cross-cultural perspective: Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman & Early Christian Antiquity: Seeing the Gods (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
Egyptian, as they can affect how a text is read. Nevertheless, I argue that previous studies have not gone far enough to situate these Jews within the land of Egypt. By understanding the ways that the environment has influenced Jewish life, we can better assess how they negotiated their identities, traditions, and ritual practices in the diaspora.

Judaism and the Physical Environment of Egypt

Previous scholarship on the Jews of Egypt has analyzed these communities largely apart from their physical realities. While scholars have noted their relationships with other cultural groups, they have not addressed how the physical environment may have shaped such encounters. As we see with the Greek immigrants in the Ptolemaic period, these communities created deities and developed new rituals that incorporated the Nile into their religious practices. Such changes in Greek ritual life did not take place apart from their material context, and therefore must be understood in light of it. Research that takes the material context into consideration has not yet been undertaken for Jewish communities apart from some recent exceptions. First, Sarah Pearce has written about Philo’s view of the Nile River and how it was shaped by Greek perceptions. While aspects of the hydric environment of Egypt are mentioned frequently in the writings of Philo, especially in the Life of Moses, Pearce connects his perspectives on the river to his overall rebuke of Egyptian atheism. Second, René Bloch has published an article that asks why Philo

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43 In his study on the book of Revelation, John W. Marshall argues that by labeling it as a Christian text creates rather than solves several textual problems. He asserts that problematic readings can be solved by understanding the text as a Jewish (not Christian) composition. This study challenges us to consider what labels are imposed upon texts and to be self-critical on how they shape our reading of a passage. John Marshall, Parables of War: Reading John’s Jewish Apocalypse (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2001). See also the work of Malcolm Choat, Belief and Cult in fourth-century Papyri (Brepols, Turnhout: 2006). In this book, Choat challenges the predicative criterus and clear-cut boundaries that are often ascribed to ancient papyri. He offers a rereading of the papyri from Egypt in the fourth century CE and creates a new narrative about the development of Christianity at the time.

44 Bonneau, Crue.

does not mention where the Hebrews will go upon leaving Egypt in his *Life of Moses*.\(^{46}\) Bloch argues that the reason why Philo does not mention the promised land, as one might expect since it is clearly laid out in the LXX, was that he was more concerned about life in Egypt than with getting to the land of Israel. He suggests that living in Egypt shaped Philo’s concerns and, by consequence, his rewriting of the exodus narrative. These two studies by Pearce and Bloch demonstrate how the study of a particular environment can raise new questions about Judaism in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt.

While Pearce and Bloch each explore the intersection between the environment and ancient Jewish writings, the majority of research has focused instead on literary developments between texts. As a result, the physicality of the Jewish experience in Egypt has received little attention. The subsequent sections will explore the basis for my methodological approach that takes into account the physical place of the Jews and the material nature of their experiences.

**I. Topophilia and the Connection between People and Place**

As shown by scholars in the field of Human Geography, there is a close, subjective relationship between people and place.\(^{47}\) Prior to the 1970s, ‘place’ was understood as an objective location to study, until the work of Yi-Fu Tuan and other theorists paved the way for thinking about place as a part of the human experience. In particular, Tuan coined the term ‘*topophilia*’ to examine the affective bond between people and place.\(^ {48}\) In his work, he explains that place is more than a location or a region; rather, it is a product of pause and offers a chance of attachment.\(^ {49}\) Place as a product of pause means that place offers a snapshot into a specific period of time. In terms of attachment, affective bonds that develop towards particular places result from the investment of


\(^{48}\) Tuan, *Topophilia*, 4.

one’s emotional life, including recollections of the past and patriotic rhetoric. \(^{50}\) Place can also be understood as something experienced by the individual as well as the collective. There are shared places, such as countries, but also more individual places, such as the home.

The experiential nature of place deviates significantly from earlier views that saw place solely as a specific point on the earth’s surface. \(^{51}\) In addition to Tuan, other scholars developed more nuanced understandings of place and how it shapes human experience. Edward Relph, for example, took a phenomenological approach to the study of place claiming that place is experienced and as such is the profound center of human existence. \(^{52}\) A slightly different approach was taken by Nigel Thrift who argued that place is an embodied relationship with the world, a constantly changing and never finished entity. \(^{53}\) Moreover, Edward Soja asserted that places were not established but instead that they were performed. As a performance, places were constantly being negotiated and redefined. What these approaches have in common is the emphasis on the role of individuals in creating and recreating place, and were considerably different from previous geographical studies on place. Considering Egypt as an experienced place can therefore open up new avenues for thinking about ancient migrations and settlements. Egypt is not merely a singular point on the earth’s surface; rather, it is constantly being experienced and shaped by people over time.

Developing an understanding of place that is connected to people and is something that can be experienced gives a new perspective on Judaism in Egypt. However, ‘Egypt’ as a singular place is an overly broad category and in need of a more specific understanding. A regional approach that contextualizes Jews within particular places (like cities or areas) in Egypt provides a more nuanced picture of how Jews adapted to life in Egypt. Moreover, one’s ethno-cultural and socio-economic setting can inform the ways in which Jews experience their surroundings.

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\(^{50}\) Tuan, *Topophilia*, 99–102. Tuan claims that “familiarity breeds affection when it does not breed contempt.” (99)


\(^{53}\) Cresswell, *Place*, 37.
spatially. For example, Jews living in Alexandria had different understandings of what it meant to live in the place called Egypt then, for example, the Jews of Edfu. Such engagements with place are therefore both culturally and physically determined.

II. Environment as a Lived Place

Place can be used to think further about the physical environment of Egypt. The term ‘environment’ is often used to refer to the socio-cultural or political context, yet it could also be understood as the physical environment. Edward Soja developed a view on space that consisted of three ways of understanding the environment. His articulation shows the different ways that the environment can be studied. First, he argued that the environment is a physical and material place that includes the natural world, the weather, and geographical features of the land; we can use our senses to understand it. Second, the environment is conceptual, which takes into account perceptions of the environment, developed in particular social, cultural, or political settings. In this more abstract view of environment understanding how Jews interacted and were influenced by other cultural ideas as well as where they stood both socially and politically can help us to contextualize the Jews in Egypt. Comparatively speaking, this environment is more conceptual than based on physical observations. Third, the environment is lived. Soja claims that at the intersection of the physical and the conceptual is a lived environment. It is within this third experiential space that we can study the overlapping of the other two spaces and how the movements of the Jews and their perceptions about their environment informed their writings.

54 Katherine Blouin helped me further my articulation on this point. It is not just physical place, but there are many features of one’s context that can shape how one views their surroundings.

55 The work of Edward Soja has been helpful in framing my understanding of an environment in this way. A professor of urban planning, he began his career as a specialist on Africa, but then turned to studying the shifting urban landscape of Los Angeles. His research brings together a wide range of disciplines, such as cultural studies and political economy. In one of his most popular books, *Thirdspace*, he drew on the work of Henri Lefebvre (*La production de l’espace* [Paris : Éditions Anthropos, 1974].) in developing a tripartite understanding of space. Lefebvre claimed that there were different modes in the production of space ranging from absolute natural space to social space. In Soja’s work, he strives to open up spatial understanding and encourages his reader to think differently about the meanings and significance of space. Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, 1996), especially 1–23 for an overview; idem, *My Los Angeles: From Urban Restructuring to Regional Urbanization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), especially ch. 6. See also the introduction to Jon L. Berquist and Claudia V. Camp, ed., *Constructions of Space I: Theory, Geography, and Narrative* (New York: T. & T. Clark International, 2007), 1–14.
In my research, I use this idea of a lived or living space as a way to consider how both the physical and conceptual environments work together. There is more to an environment than what we perceive with our senses, and more than what we think in our minds. Soja’s articulation of the combination of these different ways of perceiving the world is a valuable way to think about Egyptian Jewry insofar as the Jews of Egypt experienced the world physically and culturally. It is by looking at these two aspects of their lives that we can consider the ways in which they were shaped by and adapted to the environment of Egypt. While thinking about Egypt as a lived space (or place) is woven throughout this study, it is only when intertwined that we can gain access to thinking about Egypt as a lived place, experienced physically and conceptually by Jews.

While Soja’s articulation of space is helpful in framing the environment as lived, this is the extent of his usefulness for this dissertation. This concept of a lived place is not particular to Soja but rather he develops a digestible explanation of three different forms of perception. In this project all three of these environments will be addressed at different points to demonstrate the complexity of studying experiences with the physical world in antiquity.

III. Ancient Texts as Reflections of Experiences within an Environment

The experiences with a lived environment are reflected in Jewish literature. In particular, the exodus narratives composed in Egypt by men who had a first-hand experience of the place. Sensory experiences are referenced throughout the exodus texts. Water was not only seen, but it was touched, ingested, carried, and smelled. Engagements with these fluvial features begin with the senses and sensory experiences, a topic that has become increasingly popular in Biblical Studies. Philo describes the Nile water as drinkable (πότιµον) and pure (καθαρὰ). Ezekiel the Tragedian refers to the marshes as thick (ἕλος δασύ) and the river having a soggy shore (ὑγρᾶς

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56 Yael Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture: Sensory Perception in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2012). This book is one example insofar as she challenges the reader to think beyond the bounds of individual senses (primarily sight, which is often privileged), and to examine the senses more broadly conceived as the sensorium.

57 *Mos.* 1.101.
ποταμίας).\textsuperscript{58} For Artapanus, the Nile flood was initiated by Moses (\textit{Praep. Ev.} 9.28), and in the \textit{Wisdom of Solomon} it originates from underground springs (Wis 11.6). Such terminology is often studied in terms of its similarity to other texts, such as the LXX. However, I suggest that they can also be examined as developing in response to living in the physical environment of Egypt.

By studying the material context in which the Jews of Egypt lived, in particular how they described their fluvial surroundings, the project aims to situate Jews as concrete individuals, instead of abstract people, who wrote physical texts.\textsuperscript{59} Their writings were not only informed through their study of ancestral or contemporary literature (such as the LXX or Herodotus, which they may have read in school), but by their experiences living in the land of Egypt. An approach to the study of texts that takes into account the experiences and the senses within the text allows us to think about writings as more than words on a page, but as also windows into the realities of daily life and mundane experiences.\textsuperscript{60}

If we ignore the physical environment of the Jews, we transform the Jewish inhabitants into abstractions. As a result they become disembodied communities, studied in terms of the words or ideas they produce, but not how those words reflect their physical reality or their bodily movements. While we do not have access to live physical bodies from antiquity, this does not

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Praep. Ev.} 9.28.1–2, verse 17 and 31 respectively.

\textsuperscript{59} While we do not have any manuscript evidence for the exodus narratives from Egypt dating to the Ptolemaic or Roman periods, I will supplement my discussion on these texts with documentary papyri and inscriptions from that period. See chapter 1 for a detailed analysis of this data.

\textsuperscript{60} In 2006, a new session in the SBL Annual Conference was developed to focus on the study of experiences in the field of Biblical Studies. Since its formation, the session, “Religious Experience in Early Judaism and Early Christianity,” has met annually to discuss how to study ancient experiences, the values of such an endeavor, and to investigate different critical methodologies for the study of experiences. The session resulted in the publication of two volumes, \textit{Experientia} volume one and volume two. The \textit{Experientia} series reflects the growing interest in Biblical Studies to look into the minds of the ancient Jews and Christians. The essays comprising these volumes demonstrate how experiences can be accessed in ancient texts through different methodological strategies in order to access ancient experiences. The editors—motivated by the observation that ancient texts often have at their source some form of religious experience—assert that although it is not possible to access such experiences directly, we can take seriously the “textual articulation of religious experience in antiquity.” (\textit{Experientia Volume 1}, 1). Frances Flannery, Colleen Shantz, and Rodney A. Werline, ed., \textit{Experientia Volume 1} (Atlanta: SBL, 2008); Colleen Shantz, and Rodney A. Werline, ed, \textit{Experientia, Volume 2: Linking Text and Experience} (Atlanta: SBL, 2012).
mean that we must view ancient people apart from their material contexts. As recent cognitive approaches in Biblical Studies have demonstrated, manuscripts are physical objects and they often describe physical events or are at least informed by them. By being attuned to the ways that texts describe the body or physical surroundings, we can learn not only about what ancient Jews thought, but also about what they did (and how they moved). Such insights offer us a nuanced picture of life in antiquity.

In recent years there has been a growing interest in the study of the body and bodily engagements. Many theorists have developed new approaches for thinking about the relationship between the body and the mind, for example, and how human experiences are formed and codified in language. One such scholar, Mark Johnson, argues that all human meaning is formed through bodily engagement within an environment. His conception of meaning is very broad. It encompasses thoughts, concepts, and ideas, usually the things we associate with the mind. He argues that meaning is formed through the experiences of the body. Thus, we do not simply develop abstract ideas in our minds alone, but they in fact stem from our bodily engagements, actions that include the brain but are not exclusive to it.

61 The closest we have to real bodies are mummies and artistic depictions of human bodies, such as the Fayum portraits in Egypt.

62 In her introduction to Experientia, Colleen Shantz argues that scholars of ancient Judaism and early Christianity often think, “we can describe the context of the writers and we can analyze the texts they produce, but the processes that transform the one to the other are necessarily inscrutable” (2). In other words, the historical context is often viewed separately from the texts. The processes mentioned by Shantz are the experiences that bridge the gap between contextualization and production. It is precisely in this area, the transformation between the material context of a composition and the text produced, that my project is situated. See Colleen Shantz, “Opening the Black Box: New Prospects for Analyzing Religious Experience,” in Experientia, Volume 2: Linking Text and Experience (ed. Colleen Shantz and Rodney A. Werline; Atlanta: SBL, 2012).

63 Colleen Shantz, Paul in Ecstasy: The Neurobiology of the Apostle’s Life and Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 4. In her introduction, she offers an excellent example of how Romans 8 is commonly interpreted solely as a textual or literary problem; yet, if we consider the real living conditions of Rome at the time, we can gain more insights into the passage.

64 For a discussion on how the body can be used to think about Judaism and Jewish practice, see the introduction to Maria Diemling and Giuseppe Veltri, ed., The Jewish Body: Corporeality, Society, and Identity in the Renaissance and Early Modern Period (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 1–12.

Johnson’s approach to meaning can be applied to the study of the Jews of Egypt. If we accept that meaning is formed through bodily experiences, then we can read Jewish Egyptian texts as revealing more than how the Jews thought, but also what they did. By accessing these actions we can see how their experiences with the physical environment are contained within their texts. Being attuned to the ways in which their environment shaped them allows us a more grounded understanding of the Jews of Egypt. This study argues that not only were biblical interpreters “playing” with the exodus narrative; they were also real people living in a particular environment that shaped how they communicated the story to their audiences. Whereas such experiences are often dismissed in textual studies, ancient interpreters did live and write in particular contexts that played a role in shaping their writings. The aim of this study is therefore to raise the importance of the physical world in the development of Jewish writings that informed Jewish lives and identities in Egypt.

An Introduction to the Exodus Narratives Composed in Egypt

The exodus narratives composed in Egypt give details about the experiences of their Ptolemaic and Roman period authors with the local hydric environments. Especially when compared with other versions of the story composed outside of Egypt, such as Jubilees or the LXX, the texts from Egypt provide a wealth of new details. While not always touting the same ideas, when read together these four texts show how different Jewish authors interpreted their environmental context. Moreover, the texts also speak to different time periods. While Artapanus and Ezekiel the Tragedian originate in Ptolemaic Egypt, the Wisdom of Solomon and Philo’s Life of Moses date to the Roman period. Whereas other works written in Egypt can similarly reveal how the local environment shaped literary texts, what is unique about the exodus narratives is that they are all dealing with the land of Egypt directly. The descriptions of Egypt they offer allow us to see changing perceptions of the physical environment in Jewish literature.

The exodus narrative is first attested in Egypt in the Persian period. Selections from the book of Exodus dealing with Passover rituals appeared in a text aptly named the Passover
The next known appearance of the book is addressed in the Letter of Aristeas. According to the Letter of Aristeas, the Hebrew Torah was first brought to Egypt under Ptolemy II Philadelphus and was subsequently translated into Greek. Whether or not this legend reflects reality, it is clear that the LXX was available in Egypt as early as the second century BCE, if not earlier. One of the most popular stories found in the Torah during the Second Temple period was the exodus narrative. The version of the exodus narrative most widely known today is contained within the book of Exodus, yet it is far from the only version. Although the book of Exodus had reached an authoritative level by the Hellenistic period, this did not prevent Jews and non-Jews from rendering their own versions of this classic tale. The wide circulation of the narrative, from Egypt to Rome, attests to its early establishment as a central part of Jewish identity. However, despite its popularity, the exodus narratives often included widely differing descriptions of the plagues, the character of Moses, and the parting of the Sea of Reeds. The variegated nature of the exodus narratives in the Second Temple period can be seen in the versions composed in Egypt.

Water appears throughout the exodus story. Examples include Moses’ placement on the banks of the river as an infant, the plagues of blood and frogs involving the Nile, and the

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66 B13 Passover Letter.


68 This is by no means specific to the exodus narratives from Egypt. There are many differences that can be found in the exodus narratives from antiquity. Notably the Hebrew Bible contains different versions. For example, the Psalms give a different order of the plagues (Ps. 105). For a discussion on the exodus narrative in the Hebrew Bible see Samuel E. Loewenstamm, The Evolution of the Exodus Tradition (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1992). Diana Lipton provides an alternative reading to the biblical exodus story, which suggests that the exodus is not about liberation from persecution but it is about identity formation that results from the threat of assimilation (Longing for Egypt and Other Unexpected Biblical Tales [Sheffield: Sheffield Pheonix Press, 2008], 13–49).

69 This study focuses on the exodus narratives because the story engages clearly with the environment of Egypt. It would also be interesting to look at how other Jewish authors bring in aspects of their physical surroundings into their narratives. Additionally, the focus on the exodus is a good starting point as it takes place in Egypt therefore adding a level of complexity as it engages with their past experiences in Egypt while living in a completely different temporal context.
crossing of the Sea of Reeds by the Israelites. If we compare the exodus narratives from Egypt with the LXX, we see that while the LXX contains information about water and water-events, new ideas develop in the exodus texts from Egypt. For example, Artapanus connects Moses with the annual flood, Philo describes the flood cycle, and Ezekiel the Tragedian explains the marshes with far more description than we find in the LXX. These Jewish exodus compositions, therefore, offer a window into the development and transmission of the exodus narrative in Egypt as well as demonstrate the awareness of the physical environment by Jews in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt.

Writing the exodus narrative in Egypt gave these Jewish authors a different perspective on the story, which we see reflected in their compositions. They engaged in different ways with the narrative, offering clarifications and new interpretations relevant for their particular cultural and temporal setting. In these texts not only do Jewish authors engage with earlier traditions, but they also use their physical surroundings to retell the stories. These differences reflect the particular cultural, social, and environmental settings in which they were composed. In addition to providing a better understanding of Jewish experiences with water in Egypt, a comparative reading of these four texts also sheds light on the processes of cultural formation and memory making that were popular among Jewish groups in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt. The exodus was a part of the Jewish heritage and liturgy; they recalled the time that their ancestors lived in Egypt and used their current situation to understand this historical event. As Jan Assmann argues, memory formation is not static, but is a process. The memories preserved in the exodus narratives from Egypt therefore give insights into the way that memory of a past time came to inform their current situation living in the same place. A brief overview of how each of the texts


engages with the fluvial environment of Egypt will serve as a helpful starting point for my investigation.

I. Artapanus’ *On the Jews*

*On the Jews* was written in the second century BCE, either in Alexandria or Memphis. Fragments of this text have survived in the writings of Eusebius, who relied on Polyhistor’s summaries of Artapanus’ writings, making it a third hand source. Artapanus wrote in Greek and was familiar with the Septuagint (LXX). Three fragments have survived, each focusing on a different biblical figure that it said to have spent some time in Egypt: Abraham, Joseph, and Moses. The fragment on Moses is the lengthiest. It carefully recounts Moses’ role in the exodus narrative, and this will be the text I will examine in detail. The text weaves together elements from the LXX with other ideas only found in non-Jewish versions.

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73 Most scholars date the text to the second century BCE since it must have been written prior to Polyhistor (writing in the first century BCE). Due to its familiarity with the LXX, it is unlikely that it would be any earlier than the third century BCE. Scholars often try to find dates based on the chronological events of the Ptolemaic period. Zellentin, for example, sees the text having been written in 118 BCE (Holger M. Zellentin, “The End of Jewish Egypt: Artapanus and the Second Exodus,” in *Antiquity in Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Pasts in the Greco-Roman World* (ed. Gregg Gardner and Keven L. Osterloh; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 27–73. Collins is hesitant to adopt this specific dating (“Artapanus”) and Gruen considers this view “ingenious but highly speculative” (Erich Gruen, “Hellenism and Judaism: Fluid Boundaries,” in *Follow the Wise*: Studies in Jewish History and Culture in Honor of Lee I. Levine (ed. Z. Weiss et al.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns), 57). Most scholars are not so bold as to pin it down so specifically. For discussions see: John J. Collins, “Artapanus Revisited,” in *From Judaism to Christianity: Tradition and Transition. A Festschrift to Thomas H. Tobin, S. J., on the occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday* (ed. Patricia Walters; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 59–68.


75 Scholars tend to agree that Artapanus drew on the writings of Manetho, Diodorus of Sicily, and Hacataeus of Abdera.
One of the most striking features of the text is the role of Moses in relation to water. He is said to have invented boats and implements for drawing water (Praep. Ev. 9.27.4). Moreover, he is attributed with initiating the plagues and the first Nile flood. As the initiator he is cast in a role similar to the Egyptian gods Thoth and Isis, both connected with the flood. Incorporating Egyptian and Greek ideas about the inundation, Artapanus artfully draws upon ideas about the Nile not found in the book of Exodus and the notion of an exemplary figure of Moses found in the book of Exodus. By doing so, the figure of Moses is elevated to a position of authority, above that of any other god, Egyptian or Greek. On the Jews is significant in the different ideas it develops about water and how Moses is positioned in relation to the natural environment. A close reading of this narrative reveals the adoption of the fluvial environment of Egypt into the Jewish narrative of the exodus in a way that we simply do not see in other Jewish writings from the Ptolemaic period.

II. Ezekiel the Tragedian’s Exagoge

The Exagoge is a Greek inspired tragedy of the exodus narrative. Composed by an Alexandrian Jew, Ezekiel the Tragedian, in the second century BCE, the Exagoge offers a familiar Jewish narrative set in a distinctively Greek genre. Most scholars agree that the Exagoge was written for stage performances, possibly performed during the celebration of Passover. Interest in the Exagoge has grown in the past decade as scholars begin to recognize the significance of its

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76 The textual transmission of the Exagoge is similar to that of Artapanus’ work. The fragments we have were copied by Polyhistror then written out by Eusebius. Fragments are preserved by both Eusebius and Clement. For a recent commentary see Pierluigi Lanfranchi, L’exagoge d’Ezéchiel le Tragique (Leiden: Brill, 2006).


participation in a Greek genre, the unique descriptions of Moses, and its possible connections with Jewish mystical traditions.\(^{79}\)

The *Exagoge* describes the entire account of the exodus out of Egypt, from Moses’ birth to the Sinai episode. The fluvial environment in the *Exagoge* comes to life through the narrative. In many examples, the language of the different bodies of water present in the story (rivers, marshlands, sea) is much more descriptive than what we find in other sources. By providing more elaboration on the fluvial environment, the overall story shifts to a more relatable (and imaginable) narrative. Building on the bodily experiences of the Jews in Egypt, his audience, the Tragedian brings to life the story of the Jewish exodus out of Egypt in way that connects with their everyday lives.

III. The *Wisdom of Solomon*\(^{80}\)

The *Wisdom of Solomon* (hereafter *Wisdom*) was composed in Roman Alexandria around 50 CE.\(^{81}\) Most scholars place this book in an Alexandrian setting because of its vitriolic statements about Egyptians and its familiarity with Greek philosophical traditions.\(^{82}\) The events of the exodus appear in the last half of the book.\(^{83}\) Here the author draws together key events from the exodus out of Egypt and those from the early wanderings of the Jews in the desert. The author

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\(^{81}\) For a comprehensive account of the debate over the date of composition see David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon* (AB 43; Garden City: Doubleday, 1979), 20–25. However, not all scholars agree; see for example: Devorah Dimant, “Pseudonymity in the Wisdom of Solomon,” in *La Septuaginta en la Investigacion Contemporanea. V Congreso de la IOSCS* (ed. Natalio Fernández Marcos; Madrid: Instituto Arias Montano, 1985), 243. Dimant argues for an earlier dating (first century BCE) on the basis that she does not see any evident connections between *Wisdom* and the writings of Philo of Alexandria.


assumes familiarity with the LXX as he references events often in subtle ways. Instead of providing a point-by-point chronological retelling, the book of Wisdom employs Greek philosophical ideals and rhetorical devices in order to provide edification and encouragement to his fellow Jews in light of contemporary events through a reinterpretation of the past events from Jewish history.

Wisdom offers several insights into Jewish experiences with water. We learn about the different expectations of the natural world, the influence of Egyptian deities upon the narrative, and the knowledge of the origins of the Nile’s inundations. These references play into the overall goal of the narrative, as they demonstrate the power of the divine even in periods of tension or destruction. By using the Exodus narrative, the author of Wisdom reassures his fellow Jews of the power of the divine.

IV. Philo of Alexandria’s Life of Moses

The fourth and final text is the first book of the Life of Moses by Philo of Alexandria. Although Philo references the exodus narrative in a number of his writings (e.g. On Dreams and On the Contemplative Life), the longest and most detailed account appears in the Life of Moses. In this lengthy book, Philo traces the life of Moses from his birth to the crossing of the Sea of Reeds.

Philo was a Jew born in the late first century BCE in Alexandria. Compared to the above-mentioned authors, we know a lot about Philo’s life. He was born into an aristocratic family and was well educated. He was thoroughly versed in Greek philosophical traditions and


allegorical approaches to texts. He was involved in many aspects of Jewish life in Alexandria, but was probably best known for his participation in an embassy to Gaius to protest the treatment of Jews at the hands of the Alexandrians. Philo was both a proud Jew and a proud Alexandrian. He was deeply entrenched in the Greek language and in the Roman culture of his day. We see, for example, this in his description of the exodus story. Moses as a child was unlike any other child, says Philo, he was the most exemplary and brilliant boy (*Mos.*, 1.21–22). This description is quite different from the LXX where we learn nothing about Moses’ education or abilities. Employing popular Hellenistic models for discussing exemplary figures, Philo fills in the LXX narrative by describing Moses as the most exemplary figure to ever live.

Water appears frequently in Philo’s narrative of the exodus. Following the basic pattern of the narrative as found in the LXX, Philo inserts tangential comments about the cause of the Nile flood, the reason for why the first plague involved water, and even a description of the weather patterns of Egypt. Philo’s detailed information about Egypt and the land provide important insights into how the land of Egypt was conceptualized and understood in the Roman period.

Writing the exodus in the land of Egypt carried special weight for the authors of the narratives. They used the story to communicate to their fellow Jews about their glorified past, created a shared history and memory about a different time living in Egypt. These authors drew upon their physical surroundings, both physical and conceptual, in their narratives. As a result, we can read their texts as windows into how the Jews engaged with the physical environment of Egypt. The Nile featured prominently in their writings as well as descriptions of other aspects of their hydric

86 An event preserved in his writings (*In Flaccum* and *De Legatione ad Caium*), those of Josephus, in the letter of Claudius to the Alexandrians (*P.Lond. VI* 1912), and in the *Acta Isidori*.

context. These Jews not only lived in Egypt but they experienced first hand the land and the fluvial environment. The ways in which they adapted to this place can be seen in their writings, specifically in their writing about the exodus story.

Chapter Overviews

This study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter sets out a regional approach to the study of Jews and the physical environment in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt. This chapter begins with a historical overview of the different waves of migration of the Jews of Egypt. A detailed cataloging of the places that Jews lived in is next, which includes descriptions of their material connections to water. By studying these communities within their environmental context, and not apart from or acting upon it, this chapter brings the physical world into the discussion of Jewish life in Egypt. Using a variety of source material on Jewish experiences with water, it offers a different way of contextualizing the Jews of Egypt, as people living within their land, offering another lens for studying these communities in the Ptolemaic and Roman period.

After establishing the historical and geographical setting of Egyptian Jews in chapter one, chapter two examines several shared features of the exodus narratives composed in Egypt that stem from their experiences living in the land. The chapter begins with an accounting of all versions of the exodus narrative known in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. This allows for the texts from Egypt to be situated in the wider literary context of Second Temple Judaism and lays the groundwork for thinking about the distinctive features of the texts. The second section traces the history of the exodus story in Egypt, including references in the Elephantine documents and the legend of the LXX in the Letter of Aristeas. The third section focuses on three shared characteristics found in the four exodus narratives from Egypt: (1) a greater emphasis on the experiences within Egypt, (2) the primary characterization of Moses as a leader (and not necessarily as a lawgiver), and (3) the descriptions of the physical environment. These features, I argue, stem from their Egyptian provenance. These narratives thus reflect how the book of exodus was interpreted in Egypt as well as how the particular context of Egypt informed the developments of the accounts.
The following three chapters each explore different ways in which we can see the influence of the fluvial environment upon the exodus narratives from Egypt. Chapter three looks at how ideas about Egypt as a place shaped attitudes about the environment through an exploration of the shifting perspectives towards Egypt in the exodus narratives. In the Hebrew Bible, there is a tendency to negatively associate the Nile with the Egyptians (e.g. Deut 11:10–11). However, in the compositions from Egypt, we see the adoption of a positive attitude towards the Nile and the environment of Egypt. This is seen most clearly in how the Nile and the fluvial environment are woven into the exodus narratives. The Egyptian people continue to be described negatively (especially in the writings of Philo and in the Wisdom of Solomon), which shows the emergence of a distinction between the Egyptians and the land of Egypt, unique to Jewish narratives from Egypt. The distinction illuminates how Jewish authors were able to embrace their life in Egypt while maintaining their distinctiveness as Jews.

Chapter four examines the socio-cultural and environmental influences through descriptions of the annual inundation of the Nile in the Jewish exodus narratives. In the Ptolemaic and Roman period, both the Egyptians and the Greeks developed many theories about the inundation. Jewish authors drew upon popular theories in their time but adapted them so that they became distinctly Jewish. The presence of such references reflects an increased awareness and interest in the fluvial landscape. Furthermore it shows how the Jews were informed by Egyptian, Greek, and Roman concepts about the flood. This chapter therefore shows how the Nile and its flood became an important part of the lives of the Jews of Egypt.

The final chapter takes a broader look at the hydric terminology employed in the exodus narratives. Building on the idea that there is a connection between texts and experiences, I explore the language used to identify and describe aspects of the fluvial world, such as the Nile, canals, and the Red Sea. While each of the exodus narratives from Egypt engage with the LXX, they use different terminology to describe the physical context. The terms, I argue, are more of a reflection of their contemporary setting than their reading of the LXX. While the LXX was an important source for the narrative, the everyday experiences of the Jews of Egypt also shaped the construction of their narratives.

The study of the Jews and their relationship with the hydric environment of Egypt offers a different approach to understanding Jewish life in the Second Temple period. The Jews of
Egypt did not only live in a strictly social, cultural, political, or economic context; they were also, and most importantly, intimately engaged with their physical surroundings. Water was not simply part of the background of Jewish experiences in Egypt; rather, it was central to their lives as they developed new perspectives towards the land. The unique fluvial characteristics of the environment of Egypt shaped one of the most popular foundational narratives of Judaism. The exodus narratives of Egypt, therefore, is an essential corpus for understanding the Jews and their experiences living in the diaspora of Egypt.
Chapter 1

1 Judaism in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt: A Regional Approach

1.1 The Migration of the Jews to Egypt

The consequences of Alexander of Macedon’s founding of the city of Alexandria in 331 BCE reverberated across the Mediterranean basin. This acquisition represented a strategic move on the part of the Macedonians, who had repeatedly demonstrated their power over a substantial portion of the eastern Mediterranean world. This initial conquest of Egypt was followed by the migration of a large number of Greek settlers, who traversed the Mediterranean Sea in the hopes of a more prosperous life in Egypt. Alongside these Greek migrants came others, such as the Pheonicians, Idumeans, Ionians, and most notably for this project, Jews. The conquest by Alexander, in a sense, opened up the floodgates of immigration to the land of Egypt.

The migration of the Jews under the rule of Alexander marked the second major wave of Jewish immigration to Egypt. The first wave took place under Persian rule, when several Jews served as mercenaries at a military post in Elephantine (525–399 BCE). After 399 BCE when evidence for the Elephantine Jewish community disappears (possibly following the destruction of their temple) many of these Jews remained in Egypt, settling in various southern cities such as Edfu and Thebes. The establishment of the Ptolemaic empire in 306 BCE, in the midst of the Diodochi wars (319–275 BCE), saw a third wave of Jewish immigration to Egypt. The fourth and fifth waves came as a result of political and social instability in Palestine: the Maccabean

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2 According to Josephus, many Jews were taken captive by Ptolemy I and brought to the city of Alexandria; he also mentions that some Jews went willingly (*Ant. 12.1–9*). Cf. *Let. Aris.*, 13–14, which explains that the Jews were brought as prisoners. There is debate about the accuracy of both of these accounts.

crisis (167–164 BCE) and the Jewish wars (67–70 CE). Due to the political and social stability in Egypt compared to Palestine, the proximity between them, and the positive political relations, Egypt became a popular destination for Jews seeking to flee political persecutions and social turmoil.

Jewish life in Egypt under the Ptolemies and Romans was overall stable and prosperous. In the Ptolemaic period, the Jews were considered Hellenes. As such, they were allowed to practice their own religious rituals, engage in commercial activities with Egyptians and Greeks, and work in a variety of careers such as the military, agriculture, and fishing. They lived alongside Greeks, Egyptians, and various other cultures in different parts of Egypt. Documentary evidence shows that they settled in the southern part of Egypt (e.g. Edfu, Thebes), Middle Egypt (e.g. Oxyrynchos, Arsinoe), and Upper Egypt (e.g. Nitria, Schedia). A large population of Jews also settled in Alexandria, a city considered by/near Egypt.

In the Roman period, the status of the Jews shifted from one roughly equal to the Greeks to a lower status, equivalent to that of the Egyptians. The exact status of the Jews continues to be an elusive topic that scholars do not understand in its entirety. Nevertheless, we can see a shift in how they were identified in the Roman period. According to Kasher and Modrzejewski, life

4 Gruen, Diaspora. While many studies focus on moments of tension to define life in diaspora, Gruen takes a more positive view of diasporic living. Moreover, he does not see all events as leading to and culminating in the Jewish rebellions of 115–117 in Egypt (7).

5 According to Jonathan M. Hall, the term ‘Hellenes’ originally was an ethnic designate but became a cultural one in the fifth century BCE (Hellenicity: Between Ethnicity and Culture [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005], 222–23). He explains that the Jews in the Ptolemaic period “represent an interesting case” insofar as in many aspects they were indistinguishable from other Hellenes, yet many maintained specific Jewish practices that notably set them apart (e.g. dietary laws, circumcision, marriage customs). The unifying aspect of this large group in the Hellenistic period, at least according to Dorothy Thompson, was culture, which includes education, the gymnasium, and the language (“Hellenistic Hellenes: The Case of Ptolemaic Egypt,” in Ancient Perceptions of Greek Ethnicity [ed. Ira Malkin; Center for Hellenic Studies Colloquium, 5; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001], 301–22).

6 Cf. Fraser, Ptolemaic Alexandria (1972), 1:107. In official documents it was “Alexandria ad Aegyptum” (Alexandria by Egypt), or in Greek “Αλεξάνδρεια ἡ πρὸς Αἰγύπτωι” (Alexandria by Egypt) but never Alexandria in Egypt. This is clear in the Roman period but was not unreservedly the case under the Ptolemies (Fraser, Ptolemaic Alexandria, 1:108).

7 For a full discussion on the rights of the Jews in Egypt, see Kasher, The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt. Also Modrzejewski’s chapter 8 titled “The Jewish Question in Alexandria” that begins with a section called “The Decline” (Modrzejewski, The Jews of Egypt). Gambetti, The Alexandrian Riots, 23–76 (chapters 2 and 3) also offers an exploration of the rights of residence for Alexandrian Jews in the Ptolemaic and Roman period.
for the Jews in Egypt began to decline with the Roman conquest of 30 BCE, eventually culminating in the Jewish rebellion in 115/116 CE. Yet, despite the political tensions—such as the Jewish-Alexandrian conflict of 38–41 CE—life in Egypt was relatively prosperous for Jewish communities. This prosperity can be seen in their religious practices, construction projects, and in their population numbers.

Previous studies of the Jews of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt have examined their status vis-à-vis their cultural neighbours, their political affiliations, and their ethnic identity. Also receiving a great deal of attention has been the presence of synagogues and other places of worship, the lack of miqva’ot, and the available onomastic evidence attesting to blurred ethnic boundary lines. In such discussions the physical environment of Egypt has played little to no role despite the significant challenges faced by Jewish migrants in terms of adapting to different seasons, the lack of rain, and the reliance on the Nile’s flood for sustenance. The ways

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8 Kasher in his introduction to *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* provides an overview of the political events from the Babylonian period to 117 CE which he considers the end of “one of the most glorious chapters in the history of the Jewish people in Diaspora” (28). Overall he paints a picture of the Jews that starts out well and deteriorates over time as tensions fester and never seem to get resolved. The Jews are actively involved in their political circumstances and repeatedly push for better rights and privileges. A similar argument is made in Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt*. His narrative of decline appears when he describes the transition from Ptolemaic to Roman periods: “All in all, the Jews in Egypt had not fared too badly under the Ptolemies. A few dark clouds had appeared on the horizon, but not enough to alter the generally sunny and peaceful atmosphere of the period. Changes were in the making now: the conquering Romans were soon to reduce the Ptolemaic monarchy to the rank of a province of their empire” (157).


13 For the most comprehensive study on water in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, see the work by Danielle Bonneau. Specifically, *Le régime administratif de l'eau du Nil dans l'Égypte grecque, romaine et byzantine* (Leiden; New
in which Jews adapted to life in Egypt are contained within both literary and documentary sources, and shed new light on the understanding of Jewish life in Egypt.\textsuperscript{14}

In this chapter, I will outline Jewish connections to water in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt. I argue that to understand how the Jews engaged with water, we need to situate them \textit{within} their physical environment, and not simply as acting upon or separate from it.\textsuperscript{15} This subtle shift in thinking, drawn from ecological approaches to the study of religion, allows us to study individuals as one part of a broader picture and to move beyond strict textual study to the material context that informed experiences. To do so, I will trace the locations of Jewish communities throughout Egypt and examine how available evidence document the way they engaged with the fluvial environment, including the location of places of worship, payment of water related taxes, and how water was shared between Jews and non-Jews. The study of Jewish interactions with water exemplifies the diversity of Judaisms in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt and demonstrates the degree to which the physical environment shaped their lives.

\textsuperscript{14} As Katherine Blouin has pointed out in a conversation we had in September 2015, it is also important to recognize that there is no singular adaptation process. For example, first generation Jewish migrants would have had very different experiences than second or third generation Jews.

\textsuperscript{15} Christopher Haas undertook a similar focus on the physical context (topography) in his study on Alexandria in late antiquity. See \textit{Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 19–44.
1.2 Jewish Life within Egypt: A Regional Analysis

Understanding Jews within their fluvial environments allows for a deeper understanding of what it means to be Jewish in Egypt. The environment is not simply something that one can experience at a distance, but it becomes a part of one’s identity and shapes one’s views of the world. According to Veronica Strang, humans do not merely adapt to environmental pressures, they also “appropriate nature and act upon it…create a particular cultural space or ‘habitus’…[and]…construct it in ideological and moral terms.” Furthermore, they also engage with it imaginatively, impose meaning upon it, and invest identity and emotion in it. Tim Ingold has examined the relationships between the environment and human experiences claiming that they can be understood in two ways: 1. Humans are influenced by or influence the environment (an argument that creates distance between body and mind); 2. Humans are part of the environment and move through it (an ecological approach, bringing mind and body together). He advocates for the study of the latter, choosing instead to focus on humans as acting within the environment as this is the less explored approach to the study of the environment. In this ecological approach, humans are actively engaged with their environments and perceive them differently depending on their bodily training. If applied to the study of early Judaism, the Jews of Egypt can be seen as actively involved in the fluvial environment of Egypt (for example: drinking, irrigating crops, watering gardens, observing the rise of the Nile, etc). By studying the Jews within their

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16 For the place names of the different cities in this analysis I have deferred to the more popularly attested name in present day scholarly publications. In most cases this name is the Greek name. When it was unclear which name to use, I went with the Greek name sometimes followed by the Latin name. The exception is Arsinoe where I have used the Latin name and supplied the Greek name secondarily. For spelling, I deferred to common ones found on Trismegistos and have provided the reference in the footnotes for each city.

17 Veronica Strang, *The Meaning of Water* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2004), 5: “Human-environmental relations are also subject to ecological constraints and physiological and biological needs. As the substance that is literally essential to all living organisms, water is experienced and embodied both physically and culturally. The meanings encoded in it are not imposed from a distance, but emerge from an intimate interaction involving ingestion and expulsion, contact and immersion. Engagement with water is the perfect example of a recursive relationship in which nature and culture literally flow into each other.”


environment, we can gain insights into how they developed their own forms of Judaisms in Egypt.

Situating individuals within their physical context is a major goal of Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell in *The Corrupting Sea*. Drawing a distinction between a history of the Mediterranean and a history in the Mediterranean, they place the physical environment of the Mediterranean at the centre of their analysis by focusing on micro-ecologies and the connections that formed between them. According to W. V. Harris, Horden and Purcell formulate a new approach to the history of water management and irrigation. They further advocate for the use of ecology as a model for understanding the nature of the relationship between humans and their environment. Adopting the terminology of the discipline of ecology allows access to the “multi-faceted interaction between humanity and environment, rather than on environmental primacy, of human autonomy, or of limited responsiveness to surroundings implied by ‘possibilism.’” In the same way, taking a regional approach to the study of Judaism in Egypt allows for us to recognize the diversity of Judaisms in Egypt.

The Nilotic land of Egypt can be divided into two main ecological zones, the Nile Valley (from Wadi Halfa to the apex of the Delta) and the Delta. Other distinct areas to mention include the Fayum oasis and the Oases in the western deserts. In antiquity, Egypt was known for its extensive canal systems. Ancient irrigation techniques allowed for a regular abundance of produce and for the transportation of goods. With the establishment of the Ptolemaic dynasty, the Greeks largely adopted the irrigation systems in place before them, but they also introduced two

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25 See notably on this matter Alan K. Bowman, and Eugene L. Rogan. *Agriculture in Egypt: From Pharaonic to Modern Times* (Oxford: Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 1999). This division has been popular since the Pharaonic period as attested by the titles of Upper and Lower Egypt.
water-lifting devices: the *saquia* (water wheel) and the Achimedean screw. These inventions extended the network of canals and allowed for multiplecroppings throughout the year. The production of crops thus expanded under the Ptolemies and the Romans further refined this system. Yet, despite technological innovations, irrigation networks relied on the Nile’s annual flood, an event that largely could not be controlled by human intervention. In addition to the importance of water for irrigation, a number of canals were dug and maintained in order to facilitate the transportation of people and goods.

As Egypt’s environment was ecologically and geologically distinct from other regions of the Mediterranean, Jewish immigrants had to adapt to living in this land. However, it was not a matter of simply adopting a few new practices. Rather, since Jewish communities migrated throughout Egypt, each community adapted to the region in which they settled, which ranged from the northern Delta, known for its marshes, to the dry, arid regions of the south, characterized by a narrow habitable zone alongside the Nile. Therefore, the picture of how Jews adapted to the land of Egypt is further complicated by the regional differences between the diverse landscapes present in Egypt.

My approach to the Jews of Egypt seeks to trace out how they may have responded to various micro-ecologies in Egypt. I argue that we can use ecology as a heuristic lens through which we can understand how Jews adapted to the environment they lived in. While studies

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29 This is true until the building of the Aswan High dam in 1961, which stopped the annual Nile flood. For a discussion on some of the environmental changes that have taken place over a large scale period of time, see Daniel Jean Stanley and Andrew G. Warne, “Nile Delta in Its Destruction Phase,” *Journal of Coastal Research* 14, No. 3 (Summer, 1998): 794–825.

30 Critiques of using ecology as a model for studying history are detailed in Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*, 45–49. Others who have sought to approach the study of history from an ecological perspective include Erika
have analyzed the communities of Egypt in terms of their relationship to water, not one has looked specifically at these Jewish communities.31

Having established a framework for what it means to study Jewish life within the environment of Egypt, I will now turn to an overview of the places where the Jews of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt lived and how water figured into their everyday lives based on their geographical and environmental contexts. I have organized the locations of Jewish communities into three groups: (1) Nile Valley, (2) Delta, and (3) Fayum Oasis. Whereas the tripartite division of Egypt (Upper, Middle, and Lower Egypt) or dual division (Upper and Lower Egypt) are commonly used in modern discussions of the geography of Egypt, these divisions do not correspond to regional ecologies. Therefore, I have chosen a categorization that is more attuned to the physical environment. The following discussion relies primarily on documentary and papyrological sources. The challenge with this approach is that we do not have a lot of remaining sources and in some cases we have only one reference to a particular place. While I have chosen to present all the available information with references to water, we must be careful not to overgeneralize the data when making conclusions based on the information available. Yet, despite their limits, the evidence at our disposal will allow for the contextualization of specific sources that detail how the Jews actually used water.

1.2.1 Nile Valley

The majority of the inhabitants of Egypt lived alongside the river, either in the Nile Valley or the Delta. These are the most fertile and habitable areas in Egypt and, as such, stand in sharp contrast to the desert that consumes most of the land on either side of the river. In the summer months the annual high flood would provide the necessary water and nutrients for the agricultural crops. In


31 Studies that bring together the people and the environment of Egypt include the work of Bonneau (in particular Crue) and Blouin, Triangular Landscapes.
June the water levels would have begun their rise and by September they reached their maximum height. For the cities in Upper and Middle Egypt (Nile Valley), the flooding of the Nile was more acutely felt than in Lower Egypt (Nile Delta), as the water would have gradually been absorbed into the ground as it travelled north. Nevertheless, the flood season was welcomed universally in Egypt as it signalled the time for sowing (Fall) and then later for reaping (Winter). The populations living along the Nile depended on this source of fresh water for their agricultural production as well as for transportation.

We have several examples of Jews living in the Nile Valley. As can be seen on Figure 1, their presence is attested in towns located both in Upper Egypt (Edfu = Apollinopolos Magna, El Kanais, and Thebes = Diospolis Magna) and in Middle Egypt (Hermopolis Magna, Oxyrynchos, and Herakleopolis Magna). In all cases the settlements were located beside the river and, in the case of Oxyrynchos and Herakleopolis Magna, along the Bahr Youssef (See Figure 1). These settlements—and their populations—therefore all shared a proximity to the Nile and reliance upon the Nile and its annual flood for their sustenance.

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32 In addition to higher flood levels in the south, there was also a greater amount of sedimentation that accompanied the floodwaters. This sedimentation resulted in an increase in the level of deposits in the south, which caused the riverbed to meander more in the south than in the north. For a description of the Nile’s flood cycle and the ways in which it shaped the landscape of Egypt, see Rushdi Said, *The River Nile: Geology, Hydrology and Utilization* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1993), 61–68.
1.2.1.1 Edfu (Apollonopolis Magna)\textsuperscript{34}

Located midway between Aswan and Thebes, Edfu was an important port town located along a major trade route connecting the Nile to the Red Sea. It is situated at a bend in the Nile River, which created a large fertile area, stretching six km at its widest point.\textsuperscript{35} In addition to the river, a

\textsuperscript{33} This map is adapted with the assistance of Emily Springgay from Blouin, \textit{Triangular Landscapes}, xxi.

\textsuperscript{34} TM 269. Apollonopolis Magna is based on the Greek, however Edfu is the more popularly cited name.

\textsuperscript{35} Bagnall and Rathbone, \textit{Egypt}, 227.
canal (modern day Qandiliya canal) ran north-south cutting between the town and the desert. The area is known for its extensive use of irrigation canals and its agricultural abundance. In the Pharaonic period it was the capital of the second Egyptian Nome and served as a military outpost under the Ptolemies. Edfu declined in importance during the Roman period as the trade entrepôt moved to Koptos (200 km further south).

In the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, Edfu was mostly populated by native Egyptians. However, a number of Jews are documented in the area between the Ptolemaic and the early Roman periods. Much of the information has been found on ostraca that include tax receipts and lists of individual names (dated to the third century BCE). The onomastic data suggests that the Jews were well integrated with their cultural neighbours in the region, such as intermarriage. Within individual families, we sometimes find Jewish and Greek names side by side (as we do Egyptian and Greek), demonstrating the degree to which Jews assimilated with their cultural neighbours. In addition to the variety of Jewish names, some of the evidence refers to specific titles held in the Jewish communities. C.Pap.Jud. I 139 (O. Edfu III 368) from the first century BCE lists the names and titles of those contributing to a joint holiday meal,

36 The textual evidence from Edfu in the Ptolemaic period attests to the significant role that water played in daily life. Important geographical and topographical information has been found in land donation records and the importance of irrigation canals is inscribed on the walls of the structures of Edfu. See Joseph G. Manning, “Irrigation Terminology in the Hauswaldt Papyri and Other Texts from Edfu during the Ptolemaic Period,” in Les problèmes institutionnels de l’eau en Égypte ancienne et dans l’Antiquité méditerranéenne (ed. B. Menu; Cairo, 1995), 261–71, especially 262. See also André Bernand, Les portes du désert (Paris: CNRS, 1984) for several Greek inscriptions from Edfu that mention the Nile and its flood, especially no. 114–16 (pp. 276–80).


38 Tcherikover, C.Pap.Jud. Vol. I, 108. It is highly likely that these Jews migrated from the garrison at Elephantine where some Jews were stationed in the Persian period. See also: Sylvie Honigman, “Jewish Communities of Hellenistic Egypt: Different Responses to Different Environments,” in Jewish Identities in Antiquity: Studies in Memory of Menahem Stern (ed. Lee I. Levine and Daniel R. Schwartz; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 120–25.

39 According to Sylvie Honigman, the mixing of the names in ostraca from Edfu implies a “high level of economic integration of the local Jewish group into the local economic (and potentially social?) fabric.” (Honigman, “Jewish Communities in Hellenistic Egypt,” 121).

including a sage (σο[φός]), scribe/translator, (ἀναγνώστης),\(^{41}\) and priest (ἱερεύς).\(^{42}\) These titles suggest an organizational structure of the community that is very similar to what we have in Elephantine under Persian rule.\(^{43}\) Moreover, the mention of priests suggests that there was a Jewish temple or some other place of worship in the region, perhaps similar to the one in Elephantine under the Persians.

In terms of the Jewish engagement with the fluvial environment in Roman Edfu there are multiple references to payments by Jewish taxpayers of the bath-tax (βαλανευτικόν),\(^ {44}\) the dyke-tax (χωματικόν), and, in one instance, of the tax on cargoes sent by boat (C.Pap.Jud. II 404; O. Edfu I 141).\(^ {45}\) In the Roman period the bath-tax and the dyke-tax were capitation taxes. While in Lower Egypt the bath-tax had been popular since the Hellenistic period, it only appeared in Upper Egypt under Roman rule. The dyke-tax was collected uniformly throughout Upper and Lower Egypt and went towards the construction and maintenance of the dyke system.\(^ {46}\) The payment of such taxes did not differentiate them as Jews, rather they remained at the same level as other cultural groups, such as the Egyptians, in their payment of taxes.

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\(^{41}\) BIFAO 38 (1939), p. 57 no. 120, line 3: reference to Onias the scribe (הניה ספרא)

\(^{42}\) Kasher, The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt, 162. There remains some debate about the reconstruction of these terms, Kasher offers a detailed look at the different proposals.

\(^{43}\) These features, according to Honigman, “strongly recall the organization of the Jews and Aramaeans of Elephantine and Syrene in the Persian period.” The presence of priests and the similarities with the community at Elephantine suggests that there was a temple at Edfu, probably similar to that of Elephantine in the Persian period. See Honigman, “Jewish Communities in Hellenistic Egypt,” 122. Manning also mentions other similarities between Edfu and Elephantine, especially in regards to scribal schools (Manning, The Hauswaldt Papyri, 10).

\(^{44}\) According to Kasher, the presence of the bath-tax suggests that “there was a community bath house (ritual or not) shared by Jews and non-Jews.” Kasher, The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt, 164. Katherine Blouin examines the rise of the bath-tax (βαλανευτικόν) in a recent publication. She assembles over 700 references to this tax found in Egypt, demonstrating its high concentration in Upper Egypt (although this may be the result of surviving evidence and not indicative of there being more baths or bath-tax in Upper Egypt). Bringing in the role of ethnicity into the discussion of this tax she argues that the newly imposed bath-tax in the Roman Principate is indicative of the new relationship developed between groups of people. (Katherine Blouin, “L’État aux Bains: Terminologie fiscale et gestion étatique des bains collectifs dans l’Égypte hellénistique et romaine d’après la documentation papyrologique grecque” in 25 siècles de bain collectif en Orient. Proche-Orient, Égypte et péninsule arabique Vol. III [eds. M.-F Boussac, S. Denoix, Th. Fournet, B. Redon eds.Le Caire, Ifao, 2014], 821–34.)

\(^{45}\) There are dozens of references to the bath-tax and the dyke-tax. See C.Pap.Jud. II, 230–374 for examples dated between 56–117 CE. These taxes were paid by both Jews and non-Jews.

One striking ostracon mentions a Jewish bath-tax collector in 70 CE (C.Pap.Jud. II 240; O. Edfu I 30).\(^47\) It describes an individual who was in charge of collecting the bath-tax whose name implies he was a member of the Jewish community.\(^48\) The text demonstrates the incorporation of the Jews into the local compulsory tax service system.\(^49\) The presence of a Jewish tax collector draws similarities to another papyrus from Arsinoe, C.Pap.Jud. II 432, which also mentions an appointed figure who was Jewish and was in charge of paying the water bill on behalf of the Jewish community. The reference to a bath-tax collector along with other prominent titles given to members of the Jewish community suggests a high degree of community organization and establishment that is not evident for all Jewish communities living in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt.

1.2.1.2 El Kanais (El Atawla)\(^50\)

A nearby village to Edfu is also worth including. El Kanais (El Atawala) was located on the opposite side of the river to Edfu. In the Roman period a fort was constructed in order to protect the ancient trade route to the Red Sea through Berenike, upon which El Kanais was located. Two inscriptions offering thanks to god by certain Jews and dated to the second or first century BCE were found at the site’s the Temple of Pan. One offers thanks for safe sea travels (CIJ II 1537 = JIGRE 121) and the other praises god (CIJ II 1538 = JIGRE 122). The first is noteworthy in this study as it deals with water:

\(^47\) C.Pap.Jud. II 240: “Ischylos son of Josephos to Tryphas son of Nikon. I agree that I have had from you, with regard to the bath-tax \([\betaαλνευτικόν]\) for the 3rd year, 6 drachmai…” Translation from C.Pap.Jud. vol. II (p. 138).

\(^48\) Cf. Tcherikover, et al, “Ostraka from Apollinopolis Magma (Edfu),” in C.Pap.Jud., 138. This is similar to C.Pap.Jud. II 432, which describes a particular individual who was appointed specifically for paying the Jewish portion of the water bill.

\(^49\) This system is detailed in Naphtali Lewis, The Compulsory Public Services of Roman Egypt (2d edition; Papyrologica Florentina vol. 28; Edizioni Gonnelli: Firenze, 1997).

\(^50\) TM 4861.
Bless God. Theodotos son of Dorion, the [Judean], saved from the sea.

The location of this village along the trade route that ran between the Red Sea and the Nile means that it is likely the sea referred to travel on the Red Sea. This short papyrus mentions the praise given to God for the safe trip of Theodotus from overseas. Travel was dangerous in this time, especially sea travel, where piracy was a ubiquitous reality. This passage shows us that despite its dangers, Jews were involved in the overseas trade industry.

1.2.1.3 Thebes (Diospolis Magna)

At the ancient town of Thebes, the Nile River broadens as it is surrounded by a mountainous area forming a belt around the region. Located on the east and west banks of the Nile River just to the north of Edfu, this place attests to the wealth and prominence that it once held over the southern region of Egypt. As a former seat of power in ancient Egypt, the population of this place was largely Egyptian in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. Under Ptolemaic rule, Thebes was known for initiating rebellions, causing the authorities to establish a number of garrisons in the region with mixed results.

51 Translation from Horbury and Noy, Jewish Inscriptions of Greco-Roman Egypt, 207, except [], my modifications.


53 TM 576.

54 Bagnall and Rathbone, Egypt, 183–84.

55 In the New Kingdom, Thebes was the political centre of the south and a “powerful theocratic state under priestly warlords in the early first millennium B.C.” (Joseph G. Manning, “The Capture of the Thebaid,” in Perspectives on Ptolemaic Thebes [ed. P. F. Dorman and B. M. Bryan; University of Chicago: Chicago, 2011].)
The earliest textual attestation of the Jewish community at Thebes can be found in two Aramaic fragments among the Cowley papyri, dated to 300 BCE. In Cowley 81, there is a reference to a priest (line 39) and Cowley 82 documents a sum of money received by the community leaders (line 5). These references, along with several pieces of second century onomastic evidence, suggest that the Jews in question belonged to the elites of their communities. While there remains little evidence for the communal organization of Theban Jews in Ptolemaic times, there are references to particular figures who worked in high ranking administrative posts.

According to Josephus, Alexander of Macedon took the soldiers of Sanbalat (who were Jews) and settled them in the area of Thebes. In exchange for their service, they were given land estates (Ant. XI, 345). In addition to Josephus’ account, papyrological evidence suggests that there were Jewish military settlers in and around Thebes from at least the mid-second century BCE. Due to the proximity between Thebes and Elephantine, it is also plausible that some of the Jews migrated to Thebes from Elephantine. Furthermore, according to Honigman, onomastic evidence from the Ptolemaic period indicates that there were close ties between Edfu and Thebes. She understands this relationship not as one of descent, but instead sees the two communities co-existing alongside one another.

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56 Cowley, Nos. 81–82. The dating is based on the assumption that the Aramaic language in Egypt did not survive much later than Alexander’s conquest. For the published versions and English translation see A. Cowley, Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), 190–201. See also the discussion in Kasher, The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt, 159.

57 This is also interesting and perhaps indirectly supported by Willy Clarysse, who argues that the Greek population in Ptolemaic Thebes primarily belonged to the upper classes. See “Greeks in Ptolemaic Thebes,” in Hundred Gated Thebes: Acts of a Colloquium on Thebes and the Theban Area in the Graeco-Roman Period (ed. S. P. Vleeming; papyrologica Lugduno-Batava 27; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 1–19, esp 19.

58 Honigman asserts that these two communities lived alongside one another and took longer to adopt Greek versions of their names than other Jewish communities in Egypt. Honigman, “Jewish Communities in Hellenistic Egypt,” 123.
1.2.1.4 Hermopolis Magna

Hermopolis Magna is located in Middle Egypt, directly in the floodplain between the Nile and the Bahr Yussef. In ancient Egypt it was a border town between the Upper and Middle Egypt due to its central location. In the Ptolemaic period, it became an important military centre.

It is unclear when the Jews first settled there. Kasher argues that based on its proximity to a number of other military settlements where Jews lived (which he calls ‘Syrian villages’), it may have served as a Jewish military settlement from the early Ptolemaic period. The earliest documentary evidence of Jewish presence on the site is connected to the uprising of 115–117 CE. Sources suggest that the community was hard hit during the revolt. Although indirect evidence, we can learn about the moments of tension in Thebes and its surroundings as the fighting intensified. There are also references to where the Jews lived, specifically a Jewish street, mentioned after the end of the revolt (C.Pap.Jud. III 468, line 6–11).

1.2.1.5 Oxyrynchos

Located in the western valley of the Nile along the Bahr Yussef (a branch that feeds the Fayum region) in Middle Egypt, this site has yielded a vast number of papyri and inscriptions from the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. Under the Ptolemies it became one of the largest cities in Egypt. The Bahr Yussef would have been their primary source of fresh water, which increased its flow.

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62 TM 816.
63 Bagnall and Rathbone, Egypt, 162.
65 Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, 158.
66 C.Pap.Jud. III 468 documents the sale of some real estate on the “Jewish” street near the end of the second century CE. Other papyri that attest to the community being hard hit include: C.Pap.Jud. II 436–444, 446.
67 For a deeper discussion of these fragments and their usefulness in understanding the revolts of 115–117, see Miriam Pucci Ben Zeev, *Diaspora Judaism in Turmoil, 116/117 CE: Ancient Sources and Modern Insights* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005).
68 *P. Amh.* ii. 98.
69 TM 1524.
during the summer months due to the flooding of the Nile. As a natural waterway the Bahr Yussef was expanded in 2300 BCE to allow more water to flow into the Fayum region, which resulted in the expansion of Lake Moeris (Birkat Qarun).\textsuperscript{70} The Ptolemies similarly maintained this waterway that made it possible for more Greek inhabitants to live in the Fayum in the early years of their rule.\textsuperscript{71}

A reference to a Jewish settlement can be seen in \textit{P. Oxy} II 335 (\textit{C.Pap.Jud.} II 423) from 85 CE. The papyrus contains a declaration by Theon son of Sarapion to the local \textit{agoranomus} to register the sale of one-sixth of a house in the Jewish quarter (\textit{ἀμφόδ(ος) Ἰουδαί(ὴς)}).\textsuperscript{72}

\begin{verbatim}
Θέων Σαραπί[ν(ων) τῷ] ἁγορανόμῳ χ(αίρειν). κατάγ[ήρα]ψου ὑνή
Νικαία Σίμ[ων(ος)] οὐ[βίου]
τῶν ἀπ’ Ὀξ(υρύγχων) πόλ(εως) Ἰουδαίων
5 ἐκτοῦ μέρο(ς) οἰκίας καὶ τῶν
tαύτης χρη(στηρίων) πάντων βίκ(ού)
ἐνὸς a ἐπὶ τὸ πλεί<ον ἦ ἐλαττον> ὄντων
ἐν Ὀξ(υρύγχων) πόλ(ει) ἐπ’ ἀμφόδ(ος) Ἰουδαί(ὴς)
o[υ] ἐπράπα παρά τοῦ τοῦ a[ -1-3- ]
10 [κυλου ἀδελφοῦ Σο [ -ca.? - ]
[ - ca.10 - ] . . [ -ca.? - ]
[ - ca.9 - ] . . [ -ca.? - ]
-- -- -- -- -- -- -- --

Theon, son of Sarapion, to the agoranomus, greetings. Register of sale to Nicaea, son of Simon, son of Bius(?), of the Jews from the city of Oxyrhynchi, of the sixth share of a house and all its belongings, one \textit{bikos} (in extent) more or less, being in Oxyrhynchus in the Jewish quarter, which he bought from the … brother So-…\end{verbatim}


\textsuperscript{71} Bagnall and Rathbone, \textit{Egypt}, 158–61.

\textsuperscript{72} \textit{C.Pap.Jud.} II 423.

The text is the first five lines of a letter addressed to the agoranomos from Theon son of Sarapeion. In this text we see documentation of the sale of part of a house to Nicaea, son of Simon, who is a member of the Jewish community in Oxyrynchos. This text also makes a reference to the *amphoda* of the Jews (line 8: ἀμφόδ[ου] Ἰουδαϊκῆς). In many cities in the Roman Chora administrative districts, *amphoda*, were named (e.g. Oxyrynchos, Hermopolis Magna, and Thebes). These districts became important in the Roman period as they “allowed a greater level of precision in locating persons and property.” The appearance of a Jewish quarter is significant insofar as demonstrates the recognition of this named *amphoda* by the Roman administration.

1.2.1.6 Herakleopolis Magna

A harbour town in Middle Egypt, Herakleopolis had long been considered a religious centre for Egyptians. Located, like Oxyrynchos, along the Bahr Yussef, it became a Nome capital during the period of the Old Kingdom (2649–2150 BCE). Under the Ptolemies, the region, along with the Fayum and the Delta, experienced a large population growth.

The most significant feature of the Jewish community is its political organization. Recent findings have offered evidence for the presence of a Jewish *politeuma* in Herakleopolis. The complete archive consists of twenty Greek papyri (*P.Polit.Iud.*) and date to the reign of

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74 Benaissa, “Sixteen Letters to Agoranomi from Late First Century Oxyrhynchus,” 175–76.


76 Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, 150–51; As Kasher notes, the presence of a Jewish quarter is not the same as a Jewish ghetto. In Egypt, it was common to find ethnic quarters. (Cf. Thompson, *Memphis Under the Ptolemies*). This did not mean that all Jews lived there, but that many of them did. For an example of Jews living outside of this area, see *P. Oxy* 100 = *C.Pap.Jud.* III 454.

77 TM 801.


80 Archive is *P.Polit.Iud*. See www.trismegistos.org/archive/197 for a description of the corpus. Modrzejewski defines Politeuma as “organization of immigrants of the same (non-Egyptian) ethnic origin; it had a measure of autonomy, but it did not possess the status of a body of citizens” (*The Jews of Egypt*, 243).
Ptolemy VIII, roughly 144–132 BCE. They deal primarily with legal matters but also provide insights into the internal structure of the politeuma and Jewish perceptions of their own identity.\(^81\) The data includes references to particular figures (politarches or archontes) and official administrative correspondences between the heads of the politeuma and the presbuteroi (village elders). This archive hence illustrates how the Jews lived amongst their cultural neighbours. They both maintained their own community while simultaneously participating in the larger Hellenistic culture.

In terms of Jewish identity, the papyri suggest that certain customs were considered more central to Jewish identity than others. Those dealing with family law seemed to be of utmost importance for the Jews of Herakleopolis, whereas in other cases they visibly followed Ptolemaic law.\(^82\) In several texts, the terms “law” (νόµος) or “ancestral law” (πάτριος νόµος) or “ancestral oath” (πάτριος ὅρκος) appear in the context of issues pertaining to family law.\(^83\) Such terminological choices demonstrate one of the ways in which these Jews adapted their beliefs to their contemporary situation in Egypt.

1.2.2 Delta

The Delta is characterized by fertile and, in its northern portion, marshy land. In the Ptolemaic and Roman period, this region was believed to host over half of the cultivable land and inhabitants in Egypt.\(^84\) It begins just north of the modern city of Cairo, where the Nile splits into

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81 Honigman, “Jewish Communities in Hellenistic Egypt,” 125.

82 Honigman concludes, “The Herakleopolis papyri attest to Jews who bore Greek names but married according to biblical law; who lent money at a high rate of interest but regarded breaking these contracts as infringements of their ancestral law. Thus the boundaries of their ethnic identity, which they find themselves defined, reflect a time when Jewish halakhah was still very fluid. Family law was one thing, business transactions were quite another.” (“Jewish Communities in Hellenistic Egypt,” 129).

83 Honigman offers a more in-depth look at the terminology and its significance for understanding the Jews of Herakleopolis. See “Jewish Communities in Hellenistic Egypt,” 125–30.

various branches.\textsuperscript{85} According to Strabo, there were five main branches, which all ended in the Mediterranean Sea.\textsuperscript{86} Today, by contrast, there are two major branches. There is evidence for Jews living in eight different locations in this region: Alexandria, Schedia, Xenephyris, Thmuis, Athribis, Nitriai, Leontopolis, and Memphis. Despite a paucity of evidence, some information that can be gleaned on how Jews were using water, which in several cases sheds light on Jewish practices that both distinguished them but also connected them with their cultural neighbours.

\textsuperscript{85} In antiquity, the Canopic and the Pelousiac were the main branches. Minor ones included the Bolbitine and Busirite. Bagnall and Rathbone, \textit{Egypt}, 78–79.

\textsuperscript{86} For further primary references to the Delta branches, see Hdt 2.17; Strabo, \textit{Geogr}. 17.1, seq.; Diod. 1.33; Ptol 4.5.10; Plin. Nat. 5.10.s. 11; Mela 1.9.9; Ammianus 22.15, 16. According to Herodotus there were five “natural” branches and two “dug” ones. This totaled seven branches (\textit{Hist.}, 2.17). Strabo, by contrast mentions five branches. He does not include the two “dug” ones mentioned by Herodotus (Strabo, \textit{Geogr}. 17.1). For helpful maps that compare different descriptions of the branches of the Nile and their placement according to ancient authors see J. D. Stanley, A. G. Warne, and G. Schnepf, “Geoarchaeological interpretation of the Canopic, largest of the relict Nile Delta distributaries, Egypt,” \textit{Journal of Coastal Research} 20.3 (2004): 920–30.
1.2.2.1 Memphis

Memphis is located 30 km south of modern day Cairo, close to the apex of the Nile Delta, on the western banks of the river. There were two primary centres in Memphis, one along the banks of the Nile and another in the necropolis of Saqqara. In antiquity, it was a bustling river city and according to Bagnall and Rathbone, “a circle of dykes protected the central city from the annual flood of the Nile” and “cultivated fields, parks and nursery gardens all formed part of the city

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87 This map is adapted thanks to the assistance of Emily Springgay from Bagnall and Rathbone, *Egypt*, 79.
88 TM 1344.
89 A large number of Aramaic documents dating to the Persian period have been uncovered from Saqqara. For a detailed look at these sources, see J. B. Segal and H. S. Smith, *Aramaic Texts from North Saqqâra, with Some Fragments in Phoenician* (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1983).
surrounds." Founded just prior to 3000 BCE, it was the capital throughout the Old Kingdom (2649–2150 BCE), and continued to be an influential city in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods.

Under the Ptolemies it was Egypt’s second largest city and served as a key port along the Nile River, where taxes were collected on goods moving between Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt. It was home to a number of smaller ethnic groups (e.g. Idumeans, Phoenicians), but was primarily populated by Greeks and Egyptians. It is difficult to disentangle the Jews of Memphis from other Semitic settlers, specifically Jewish practices or roles are hard to identify in primary sources.

The earliest Jewish settlers probably arrived in the Persian period. According to tradition, the prophet Jeremiah denounced Egypt for its peace and prosperity (Jer 42:13–14), encouraging his fellow countrymen not to migrate there. Yet ironically, Jeremiah is said to have eventually escaped to Egypt with other Jews following the destruction of the temple in 586 BCE. Additionally, under the Persians, Jews populated the garrison at Elephantine. Dorothy Thompson thus believes that Jews may have been stationed at a garrison at Memphis as well.

Documents related to the Jewish inhabitants of Ptolemaic Memphis suggest that there may have been a Jewish quarter and a Jewish cemetery, although the precise locations of both are unknown. It has also been proposed that there was a Jewish synagogue built there based on the concentration of Aramaic tombstones, which suggests a Jewish presence in the city under the Ptolemies. As was the case in Edfu, evidence from Memphis documents a mix of Persian and

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91 Bagnall and Rathbone, *Egypt*, 94–106. The visit of Alexander of Macedon to Memphis is a further demonstration of the significance of this city in the pre-Ptolemaic and early Ptolemaic period.
92 Thompson, *Memphis*, 90.
93 Thompson, *Memphis*, 90.
94 Thompson, *Memphis*, 90. The Berlin Stele 2118 specifically mentions a Phoenician quarter, however it is thought that Judeans may have lived here as well. A discussion of the stele can be found in Von Heinrich Schäfer, “Ein Phönizier aug einem ägyptischen Grabstein der Ptolemäerzeit,” *ZA*W 40 (1902): 31–35.
95 Thompson, *Memphis*, 90.
Semitic names dated to the third century BCE, implying a high degree of cultural interaction. Finally, a Demotic execration text from the same period mentions “the commander of the Jews,” which may imply that some of the Jews living in Memphis were military settlers.

1.2.2.2 Leontopolis (Tell el-Yahudiya)

Leontopolis is situated northeast of the city of Cairo and north of ancient Heliopolis, along the Pelousiac branch of the Nile. Evidence for a Jewish presence at this site includes references in Josephus’ Antiquities and The Jewish War as well as Jewish tombstones dated to the first century BCE (Ant., 13.70, War., 1.189–190). According to Josephus, in the Ptolemaic period a group of Jews led by Onias IV asked permission of the ruling powers to settle in this place and its environs. Josephus claimed that the Jews settled in a number of cities in the Heliopolite region including Leontopolis that became known as the country of Onias (War., 1.190). It was here

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96 Thompson, Memphis, 91. See P. Gurob 22 (a list of shepherds and goatherds who cared for the sacred flocks of different temples in the third century BCE).


98 TM 1239.

99 This includes other cities such as Demerdash, Tell-el-Yahous, and Tell-el-Yahudiya.

100 Gideon Bohak disagrees with the location of the Temple in Leontopolis and suggests Heliopolis instead based on his reading of Joseph and Aseneth, which he dates to the second century BCE. His argument is that the text shows parallels between the holy food and drink with the practices of ritual purity performed by Jewish priests in connection with the temple of Onias (Gideon Bohak, Joseph and Aseneth and the Jewish Temple in Heliopolis (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 27–28, 55–57). Two features of the book tie it specifically to this region: 1. The field of our inheritance - refers to the plots of land given to the Heliopolitan Jews (pp. 64–47); 2. Aseneth’s House—it is not just a house, but a temple. Temple complex, Tower, curtain—all appear in the text, echo temple imagery. Also, there is a holiness aspect. Finally, her temple is transformed, consecrated (parallels her own conversion). For these reasons, Bohak argues that the novel gives new insight into Heliopolitan landmarks. Nevertheless, several scholars disagree with Bohak’s early dating and with the placement of the Temple in Heliopolis. Ross Kraemer, for example, proposes to date it to as late as the fourth century CE. She argues for this on the basis that the longer text of Joseph and Aseneth represents the older version (unlike Bohak who argues for the shorter text being more antique). Rivka Nir similarly favours a late date, identifying it as a late antique Christian writing. See Ross Shepard Kraemer, When Aseneth Met Joseph: A Late Antique Tale of the Biblical Patriarch and His Egyptian Wife, Reconsidered (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Rivka Nir, “Aseneth as the ‘Type of the Church of the Gentiles,’” in Early Christian Literature and Intertextuality vol. 1 (ed. C. A. Evans and H. D. Zacharias; London: T & T Clark, 2009), 109–37. In terms of the location of the Temple, Modrzejewski finds the epigraphical evidence sufficient grounds for locating the Temple in Leontopolis (The Jews of Egypt).
that Onias built a temple modeled off the one in Jerusalem (Ant., 13.72; War., 1.33): “So Onias took the place, and built a temple, and an altar to God, like indeed to that in Jerusalem, but smaller and poorer.”

The temple was eventually destroyed in 73/74 CE following the Jewish war in Palestine.

Epigraphical evidence from the Roman period further suggests a Jewish presence in the region. The presence of Jewish tombstones in the Jewish cemetery in Leontopolis sheds light on Jewish life in Egypt at the end of the first centuries BCE to the first centuries CE. Out of the eighty inscriptions several refer to the land of Onias (e.g. JIGRE 38 = CIJ II 1530). In one example the land of Onias appears in a stele remembering the life of Arsinoe who died at age twenty. The text is written in Greek and dates between the mid-second century BCE to the early second century CE.

The stele bears witness.
“Who are you that lie in the dark tomb? Tell me your country and your father.”
“Arsinoe, daughter of Aline and Theodosios. The famous land of Onias reared me.
“How old were you when you slipped down into the shadowy region of Lethe?”
“At twenty I went to the mournful place of the dead.”
“Were you married?”
“I was.”
“Did you leave him a child?”
“Childless I went to the house of Hades.”
“May the earth, the guardian of the dead, be light on you.”
“And for you, stranger, may she bear fruitful crops.”
In the sixteenth year, Payni 21. (CIJ II 1530 = JIGRE 38)

The Doric dialogue of the stele emphasizes her Jewish family heritage (the name Theodosios in particular) and the mention of the land of Onias, which “reared her.” The language of Lethe

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101 Onias’ temple probably located in ancient Leontopolis based on the Jewish epigraphical evidence found at the site (based on Josephus, War, VII.426). According to Modrzejewski, the temple there was not intended to be a rival temple to the one in Jerusalem rather “it was simply intended to serve the religious needs of the Jewish soldiers in the ‘land of Onias’ ” (Modrzejewski, The Jews of Egypt, 128).
103 Translation from Horbury and Noy, Jewish Inscriptions, 90–94. See also Modrzejewski, The Jews of Egypt, 130.
and Hades are attested in numerous Jewish texts in the Hellenistic period and therefore are not exclusive to Greek authors. The blessing on bearing fruitful crops is interesting insofar as it emphasizes the importance of this to the stele writer, offering a link to the flooding of the Nile, which was largely responsible for a successful crop season.

The presence of tombstones, like the one cited above, lends support to Josephus’ claim that Onias chose this region to build his city and temple. This inscription sheds light on the burial practices of the day and how the dead were venerated through engraved stones by the Jewish community of the town.

1.2.2.3 Athribis (Tell el-Atrib)

On the southern tip of the Delta, along the modern Damietta branch of the Nile (about 50 km north of Cairo) is the town of Athribis, which was the capital of the Athribic Nome. Several inscriptions found there refer to a local place of worship (CIJ II 1443–1445). The exact date of the inscriptions are not known, though scholars tend to situate them during either the reigns of Ptolemy V Epiphanes (204–180 BCE), Ptolemy VI Philometor (180–170 BCE), Ptolemy VIII Physcon (Euergetes II) (145–116 BCE), or Ptolemy IX Lathyros (116–107 BCE). The inscriptions suggest that the Jewish community functioned as a legal body and as such may have had the same rights as the community in Schedia. In particular Kasher argues that in Athribis,


\[105\] For more stelae from Leontopolis see Horbury and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*.

\[106\] TM 369.

\[107\] Bagnall and Rathbone, *Egypt*, 82.

\[108\] Kasher argues for Ptolemy VI Philometor due to his relative friendliness to the Jews (Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, 116).

Jews were able to administer their own funds and solicit gifts from private donors for public use.110

A look into some of the inscriptions can shed further light on this community. One inscription found at Athribis mentions the gift of an exedra (ἐξέδραν) by a Jewish family to the proseuche dated to the first to second century BCE (CIJ II 1444 = JIGRE 28).111 Horbury and Noy note that the word exedra had a “wide range of meaning in the Hellenistic and Roman periods” that is “often applied to structures ranging from free-standing outdoor sitting places to sub-divisions of or annexes to private houses and public buildings, including gymnasia, temples, and churches.”112 In the case of the exedra at Athribis, it was likely a room that was connected to the side of the proseuche, which provided extra space for meetings. A possible interpretation of this addition is that the Jewish population had grown or that it eventually was able to expand its meeting place. Nevertheless, both the proseuche and the exedra indicates the importance of having a communal space for the community at Athribis.113

Another inscription from the second to first century BCE, CIJ II 1443 (JIGRE 27), mentions a chief of police on the honorific dedication of the proseuche:

ὑπὲρ βασιλέως Πτολεμαίου | καὶ βασιλίσσης Κλεοπάτρας, | Πτολεμαῖος Ἐπικύδου, | ὁ ἐπιστάτης τῶν φυλακιτῶν, | καὶ οἱ ἐν Ἀθρίβει Ἰουδαῖοι, | τὴν προσευχὴν | θεῶι ὑψίστωι.

On behalf of king Ptolemy and queen Cleopatra, Ptolemy son of Epikydes, chief of police, and the Jews of Athribis (dedicated) the proseuche to the Most High God.114

110 Kasher, The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt, 118.
111 Proseuche is the most frequently used term when referring to Jewish places of worship in Egypt. According to Martin Hengel, the term proseuche is an older term than synagogue that developed in the diaspora. It roughly means the same thing as synagogue. Rajak thinks this is plausible but also points out that Hengel is filling in some of the gaps (Tessa Rajak “Synagogue and Community in the Graeco-Roman Diaspora,” in Jews in the Hellenistic and Roman Cities [ed. John R. Bartlett. London: Routledge, 2002], 22–38, here 28.
112 Horbury and Noy, Jewish Inscriptions, 49.
113 Modrzejewski, The Jews of Egypt, 96.
114 Translation from Horbury and Noy, Jewish Inscriptions, 45.
This text mentions an individual, Ptolemais son of Epikydes, who is called a chief police officer (ὅ ἐπιστάτης τῶν φυλακιτῶν).\textsuperscript{115} The term φυλακίτης is a term for police officer that is specific to Egypt and is attested between the Ptolemaic period and 342 CE.\textsuperscript{116} The position was compulsory for some men between the ages of 18 and 50 years old and the individual was commonly responsible for a village, an amphodon, or a metropolis.\textsuperscript{117} According to Modrzejewski, the officer was a Jew as it is not likely that a non-Jew would take on this role relating to the Jewish proseuche.\textsuperscript{118}

An inscription from the Roman period suggests that the Jews had been landowners in Athribis prior to the Jewish revolt (C.Pap.Jud. II 448 = P. Oxy. 3 500, dated to 130 CE). The papyrus is addressed to the strategos of the Athribic Nome from a group of people looking to lease joint land and pay more rent than their predecessors. The land that they are requesting is public land (δῆμοσίας γῆς) (line 13) that formerly belonged to “Jews who have been killed and Greeks without heirs” (Ἰουδαίων ἀνευρήματος καὶ Ἑλλήνων ἀκληρομένων) (line 11–12). These Jews had probably abandoned their land as a result of the Jewish revolts and thus it had fallen into the public domain. While the text is fragmentary, it suggests that the new tenants were willing to pay more for the rent than the former. A reason that is suggested in the text, although some key lines are missing, is that the land used to be privately owned and is now public land. Public land tends to be more profitable than private land, because it was generally taxed at a higher rate.\textsuperscript{119} In addition to the categorization of types of lands in Athribis, what is significant about this text is that it documents both the presence of Jewish landowners in the Athribitic nome in the early second century CE and offers us a glimpse into the agrarian dimension of the 115–117 CE Jewish uprisings in the Egyptian countryside (Jewish landowners were killed and their


\textsuperscript{116} Lewis, The Compulsory Public Services of Roman Egypt, 49.

\textsuperscript{117} Lewis, The Compulsory Public Services of Roman Egypt, 49.

\textsuperscript{118} Modrzejewski, The Jews of Egypt, 94. He argues that the officer was a Jew because he sees is as unlikely that a non-Jew would take on “such an initiative, and even more so that his offer would gain the approval of the community.”

\textsuperscript{119} Blouin, Triangular Landscapes, 149.
property seized by the Roman fisc – more specifically the Idios Logos department – and turned into public land\textsuperscript{120}.

1.2.2.4 Thmuis\textsuperscript{121}

Situated in the northeastern Delta, in the Mendesian Nome, is the town of Thmuis. Located only 20 km south of the Mediterranean and established originally along the Mendesian branch of the Nile, Thmuis had a (so far unidentified) fluvial harbour that served the needs of its inhabitants. A history of this town is significant to discuss insofar as it demonstrates how the physical hydrological environment shaped its importance throughout the Hellenistic and Roman period. While the neighboring town of Mendes had been one of the most prosperous port cities in the Delta in the Persian and early Hellenistic periods, Thmuis gradually became more prominent than Mendes starting in the first century CE eventually resulting in the transfer of power as the capital moved from Mendes to Thmuis. The reason provided for that transfer of power has been attributed to the changing “hydrological and cultural environment.”\textsuperscript{122} Both archaeological and textual evidence point to this shift in which the Mendesian branch moved eastwards throughout the Hellenistic period until the second century BCE when it began silting up. The Busiritic branch, as a result, increased its size. Thmuis then became a popular place as its harbors did not dry up like those of Mendes. This urban zone offers an example of how local Egyptian communities “adapted to the local environmental and cultural setting.”\textsuperscript{123}

Evidence of a Jewish presence at Thmuis is attested in a second century CE papyrus C.Pap.Jud. III 452b (P. Strasb. 4.299r). The papyrus was found at Oxyrhynchus but it is believed


\textsuperscript{121} TM 2405.

\textsuperscript{122} Blouin, Triangluar Landscapes, 90.

\textsuperscript{123} Blouin, Triangluar Landscapes, 102.
to have been from the Mendesian Nome, specifically Thmuis.\textsuperscript{124} The text mentions Jews (Ἰουδαίων) in the context of a specific capitation tax named emporia Ioudaion (ἐµπορίας Ἰουδαίων) (line 14). The purpose of the tax is unknown, but it was managed by the Dioikesis department, along with other minor miscellaneous taxes. This reference is the only source that mentions Jews in the northeastern Delta and is significant insofar as it further shows the spread of Jews in the Roman period. Moreover, the hydrological and cultural history of Thmuis make it an interesting place to discuss in light of the importance of water to the inhabitants of Egypt.

1.2.2.5 Nitriai (Tell el-Barnugi)\textsuperscript{125}

Nitriai (modern day el-Barnugi) is located close to Alexandria. While known from antiquity, the precise location of this place has been confused over time. The modern Wadi Natrum and the ancient location of Nitriai have often been confused, even today. While C.Pap.Jud., CIJ, and Kasher still situate the city in Wadi Natrun, a more convincing argument has been proposed and well documented by André Bernand.\textsuperscript{126} As a town located along the Canopic branch of the river, it likely became a place for Jewish settlements alongside other cities such as Schedia, Xenephryis, and Athribis.

Only one reference to the Jews at Nitriai gives insights into this Jewish community. It is an honourific dedication of a proseuche CIJ II 1442 (JIGRE 25) dated between 140–116 BCE. The passage reads:

\begin{quote}
Ὑπὲρ βασιλέως Πτολεμαίου | Καὶ βασιλίσσης Κλεοπάτρας | Τῆς ἀδελφῆς καὶ βασιλίσσης | Κλεοπάτρας τῆς γυναικός,| Εὐεργετῶν, οἱ ἐν Νιτρίαις | Ἰουδαῖοι τὴν προσευχὴν | Καὶ τὰ συνκύροντα.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{124} Blouin, Triangular Landscapes, 237.

\textsuperscript{125} TM 1473.

On behalf of king Ptolemy and queen Cleopatra the sister and queen Cleopatra the wife, Benefactors, the Jews in Nitriai (dedicated) the proseuche and its appurtenances.\(^{127}\)

What is noteworthy about this inscription dedicated to Ptolemy VIII Physcon (Euergetes II) and his family is that it refers to appurtenances (συνκύροντα) attached to the synagogue. Other examples, including \textit{CIJ} II 1441 from Xenephyris also mention other constructions attached to the proseuche (πυλῶνα). Yet while the reference to another attached part of a proseuche is found elsewhere, this specific term, συνκύροντα, is unique, making it hard for us to understand what it specifically refers to.\(^ {128}\)

1.2.2.6 Xenephyris (Kom el-Akhdar)\(^{129}\)

Xenephyris is located on the northwestern edge of the Delta, close to Alexandria, near Damanhur. Also located along the Canopic branch of the Nile, it would have relied heavily on the river just as Schedia and Alexandria as both a source for fresh water and transportation. An inscription found in this place dedicates a gatehouse (a part of the synagogue) to Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II Physcon (143–116 BCE) (\textit{CIJ} II 1441 = JIGRE 24)\(^ {130}\):

\[ \text{ὑπὲρ βασιλέως Πτολεμαῖου | καὶ βασιλίσσης Κλεοπάτρας τῆς | ἀδελφῆς καὶ βασιλίσσης Κλεοπάτρας τῆς γυναικός, οἱ ἀπὸ | Ξενεδώρου Ἰουδαίοι τὸν | πυλῶνα τῆς προσευχῆς, | προστάτων Θεοδώρου | καὶ Ἀχιλλίωνος.} \]

\(^{127}\) Translation from Horbury and Noy, \textit{Jewish Inscriptions of Greco-Roman Egypt}, 42. For French commentary and detailed notes, see Bernand, \textit{Le Delta égyptien}, 960–61.

\(^{128}\) It is not clear exactly what function these appurtenances played, but scholars have drawn connections to the exedra at Arthribis (\textit{CIJ} II 1444), Alexandria’s sacred precinct (\textit{CIJ} II 1433, no. 10), the pulon on Xenephyris, ritual baths or public water supply at Arsinoe (\textit{C.Pap.Jud.} II 143) and communal archive (\textit{CIJ} II 1404).

\(^{129}\) TM 6606.

\(^{130}\) The structure seems to be similar to Egyptian temples (an enclosed space as a part of the complex). Modrzejewski, \textit{The Jews of Egypt}, 98.
On behalf of king Ptolemy and queen Cleopatra the sister and queen Cleopatra the wife, the Jews of Xenephyris (dedicated) the gateway of the proseuche when Theodore and Achillon were presiding.\textsuperscript{131}

According to Kasher, the synagogue must have been built prior to the dedication of the gateway, therefore the Jews must have settled there by early to mid second century BCE (at the latest). The inscription also reveals information about the leadership of the Jewish community with the reference to two \textit{prostatai}, Theodoros and Achillos.\textsuperscript{132} It is not clear exactly what this word refers to but “the fact that they figure in a congregational dedication indicates that they were legal personages recognized by the authority, and that they had prominent positions in the community which was an organized body that had legal status.”\textsuperscript{133}

1.2.2.7 Schedia\textsuperscript{134}

This town (modern Kafr ed-Dawar) was located twenty km east of Alexandria along the Canopic branch of the Nile (see Figure 3).\textsuperscript{135} According to Strabo, who writes of the Augustan age, it was a harbour where cargo passed through on their way to or from Alexandria.\textsuperscript{136} Jewish communities began establishing themselves in Schedia as early as the third century BCE. The

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{131} Translation from Horbury and Noy, \textit{Jewish Inscriptions of Egypt}, 40.
\end{flushleft}

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\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{133} Kasher, \textit{The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt}, 114.
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\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{134} TM 2096.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{135} Marianne Bergmann, Michael Heinzelmann, and Archer Martin, “Schedia, Alexandria’s Harbour on the Canopic Nile,” in \textit{Lake Mareotis: Reconstructing the Past} (ed. Lucy Blue; BAR International Series 2113; Oxford: Archaeopress, 2010), 107–17. For the most updated archaeological survey on Schedia (under the direction of Marianna Bergmann and Michael Heinzelmann, see http://schedia.de/.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{136} Even the name Schedia (Σχεδία) in Greek means ferry, raft, or float (LSJ 104697), further illuminating the vocation of the city. The proximity of the city to the river is mentioned in \textit{3 Maccabees}, where the Jews were persecuted during the reign of Ptolemy IV Ptolopator (222–205 BCE). Schedia was chosen as the perfect place since those coming into the city (of Alexandria) and those going into the countryside (Chora) would see the Jews being punished (\textit{3 Macc} 4:11).
\end{flushleft}
oldest identifiable Jewish inscription found in Egypt, carved on a marble slab, dedicates a proseuche to King Ptolemy III Euergetes I (246–221 BCE): 137

ὑπὲρ βασιλέως | Πτολεμαίου καὶ | βασιλίσσης | Βερενίκης ἀδελ|

On behalf of king Ptolemy and queen Berenice his sister and wife and their children, the Jews (dedicated) the proseuche. 138

Kasher argues that the dedication proves that they functioned as a legal organization that was publicly recognized. 139 He goes on to say that if they were considered a legal body then they would have had a “royal sanction for erecting a synagogue, owing and administering public property, as well as for issuing public decrees.” 140 The town is also mentioned in Josephus, the Letter of Aristeas, and 3 Maccabees in connection with the Jews of Egypt. 141

According to Josephus (first century CE), the Jews had been involved in policing the Nile (fluminis custodia) in the canal that passed through the town of Schedia. 142 As a town located in the greater Alexandrian region, Schedia served both as a station for vessels as well as a place where duty was collected on merchandise. The Jews, as custodians of this portion of the river, were likely involved in both offering protection to boats carrying cargo to and from the harbour.

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137 CJI II 1440 = JIGRE 22. Other examples of honourific dedications of a proseuche includes: JIGRE 9, 13 (Alexandria); 24 (Xenephyris); 25 (Nitria); 27, 28 (Athribis).

138 Translation from Horbury and Noy, Jewish Inscriptions of Greco-Roman Egypt, 35.


140 Kasher, The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt, 110.

141 Let. Aris. 12ff; 36ff; Josephus, Ant. XII.8, 45–47; C. Ap. II.44; 3 Macc. 4:2.

142 C. Ap. II.64. “but [the Judeans] still were desirous to preserve what the kings had formerly intrusted to their care, I mean the custody of the river: nor did those kings think them unworthy of having the entire custody thereof upon all occasions” (sic). Translation by A. M. William Whiston, The Works of Flavius Josephus, Complete and Unabridged (Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., Peabody, 1988). Note that the timing of when precisely this took place is not clear, but it was likely prior to Josephus’ lifetime.
In this role, they would likely have worked alongside other cultural groups, such as Egyptians or Romans.\footnote{143}

The protection of the river was critical for maintaining peaceful trade relations throughout Egypt and beyond. Schedia was an important post as it divided the city of Alexandria, port to the Mediterranean world, and the Chora, the countryside of Egypt. The position of authority for the Jews working at this critical juncture emphasizes their status at this point in history. Furthermore, it demonstrates the integration and cohabitation of the Jews amongst Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans. The Jewish police officers would have engaged daily with different ethnic groups, and likely lived alongside them as well. As such, these Jews were deeply integrated in their diverse cultural surroundings and for them, the Nile River offered steady employment opportunities.

1.2.2.8 Alexandria

Founded on the Egyptian settlement of Ra-Kedet (Rhakotis), it was established as a major city by Alexander of Macedon in 331 BCE. It became a cultural centre under the Ptolemies, further opening up the land of Egypt to the rest of the Mediterranean world. The city was nestled

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144 This map is adapted thanks to the assistance of Emily Springgay, original from Emad Khalil, “The Sea, the River and the Lake: All the Waterways Lead to Alexandria,” *Bollettino di Archeologia online* 1 (2010): 36.

145 TM 100.

146 For a discussion on the physical context of Alexandrian writers see P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), especially chapter 1 “Foundation and Topography.” See also the work of Christopher Haas whose second chapter explored the topography of the city of Alexandria in late antiquity, focusing on the built environment (*Alexandria in Late Antiquity*, 19–44).
between the coast of the Mediterranean and Lake Mareotis on the south. It had two main harbours, the Great Harbour to the east and the Eunostus (Harbour of Fortunate Return) to the west. Between these two harbours was (and still is) a dyke that connects the mainland to the island of Pharos. Alexandria was also connected to the Canopic branch of the Nile via a constructed channel (Canopic channel). Both the river and the lake served as entryways into the Chora (countryside of Egypt). According to Strabo, many canals from the Nile fed into the lake and during the summer months (that is during the flood) they would fill the lake, submerging all marshy areas (Geogr., XVII.1.7).

The Jews first arrived in the city following Alexander’s conquest of Egypt. According to the Letter of Aristeas, many came as captives but were eventually liberated by Ptolemy II. Following their release, many chose to remain in Egypt. Under Ptolemaic rule, they settled in Alexandria and its surrounding areas. By the Roman period, there was a specific Jewish quarter in the city where many of them resided (Delta quarter). The city being linked to the Canopic branch, it certainly would have benefitted from the annual flood; however, the rise of the water would not have been as pronounced as other cities further south, such as Memphis.

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147 Lucy Blue, ed., Lake Mareotis: Reconstructing the Past (BAR International Series 2113; Oxford: Archaeopress, 2010), vii: “Lake Mareotis is a shallow body of brackish water currently about 90 km$^2$ in an area that extends south of Alexandria for about 12 km and to the west in the form of an arm some 40 km and is 3 km wide.” She further explains that it was likely much larger in antiquity.

148 Bagnall and Rathbone, Egypt, 51–69.


151 Letter of Aristeas 12–27, especially 22–25. For another account see Josephus, Ant. XII, 1. Benjamin G. Wright III, The Letter of Aristeas (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 121–24 (translation) and 130–36 (textual notes on the “official” decree to release the Jews). Wright offers a detailed look at the decree and the plight of the Jews before and after. He suggests that the author of Aristeas here is using elements from the narrative of the exodus to explain the Jewish experience as slaves. Building on what Sylvie Honigman has titled the “Exodus Paradigm,” Wright sees Ptolemy I as the pharaoh while Ptolemy II is the liberator. Yet in Aristeas, there is no departure from Egypt. While I agree that parallels can be drawn between Aristeas and the exodus story, Aristeas remains quite different from the other exodus narratives explored in this dissertation.

152 Evidence suggests they settled in Schedia as early as 246 BCE if not before. Cf. CLII 1440 = JIGRE 22.
which saw a regular rise of sixteen cubits. Fishing was a very important industry, as was farming in the rural periphery of the city.

While the Nile had always been the primary means for internal travel and transportation in Egypt, traffic increased greatly with the shift towards more international trading under the Ptolemies and the Romans. Several papyri from Egypt mention the involvement of the Jews in the riverine trade and transportation industry. The earliest reference dates from 89–90 CE (C.Pap.Jud. III 518b). The papyrus describes a Jew involved in river transport of state grain to the granaries in the Neapolis quarter of the city of Alexandria. Other examples are not specific to Alexandria, though they may have travelled there at one point or another.

Several texts written in Alexandria document how local Jews used water in their daily and ritual lives. Philo mentions in On the Contemplative Life that a group of pious Jews called the Therapeutae lived just outside of Alexandria and drank pure water drawn from underground

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153 Said, The Nile, especially part 2 (95–171) and part 3 (175–256).

154 The fishing would not have been confined to the river, but also done in the lake and the sea. Other activities would have been the cultivation of waterplants and water hunting.

155 The source mentions a Sambathion, which is not universally accepted as referring to Jews. I think it is reasonable to assume this is a Jew due to the presence of many Jews in Alexandria at this time and due to the close similarities between Sambathion and Sabbath. For a discussion on this group see Tcherikover, Fuks, and Stern, C.Pap.Jud. Vol. III, 43–56.

156 Several sources attest to riverine transportation and the Jews. In the papyri from Elephantine, a text from 464 BCE describes certain individuals as being “boatmen of the rough waters” (See Bezalel Porten, Archives from Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968]). According to Bezalel Porten, “this was the title of the skilled pilots who navigated the rapids of the first Nile cataract and it corresponded to Egyptian ‘boatman of the bad water’ (P. Berlin 13614.1 [C27])” (Porten, Archives from Elephantine, 160). Since Elephantine was a small island, fluvial navigation would have been extremely common. Furthermore, in a document from 411 BCE we see a report on the repairs needed for a boat used by the Elephantine Jews. Due to the expensive materials used for the construction, it has been conjectured that the vessel may have been used for ceremonial purposes (Porten, Archives from Elephantine, 115). The importance of boats is also mentioned by Artapanus, who claims that Moses taught the Egyptians how to construct them. We do not know exactly what kinds of ceremonial uses these boat would have had. Royal barges were famously transported along the river as a demonstration of power under the Ptolemies (and quite likely by the ancient Egyptians as well). See for example, Dorothy Thompson, “Hellenistic Royal Barges,” in The Ptolemies, the Sea and the Nile: Studies in Waterborne Power (ed. Kostas Buraselis, Mary Stefanou, and Dorothy J. Thompson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 185–96. A later source, C.Pap.Jud. III 469 from the third century CE, similarly mentions a Jew engaged in the transport of state grain along the Nile. The business letter (provenance unknown) explains, “it is time to put the boats on the river, so that we may bring the boat down [to…]” (C.Pap.Jud. III 469. Translation from Tcherikover in C.Pap.Jud. Vol. III, 30).
springs.\textsuperscript{157} In the \textit{Letter of Aristeas}, seventy Jewish scribes are described as washing their hands in the sea before attempting their translations of the Torah (306–308). The passage has been read as evidence for ritual washing practices among the ancient Jews living in Alexandria. Specifically it suggests a connection between reading Torah and ritual purity.\textsuperscript{158}

In comparison to these literary examples, several inscriptions document the dedication of structures (E.g. \textit{proseuche} mentioned in JIGRE 9 = CLI II 1433 [second century BCE] and JIGRE 13 = CLI II 1432 [37 BCE?]). These inscriptions show that the Jews were well established in Alexandria. The lack of documentary sources can be attributed mainly to the climate in the region. Unlike the dryness of Upper Egypt, the Delta was comparatively lush and moist, resulting in an expedited destruction of papyrological sources.

\subsection*{1.2.3 Fayum}

The Fayum is a semi-oasis located west of the Nile River, 100 km south-west of modern day Cairo. First inhabited in the fifth millennium BCE, the region underwent two major agricultural expansions.\textsuperscript{159} The first was in the twelfth dynasty (New Kingdom), when the cultivatable land was expanded to 450 km\textsuperscript{2}. This was done by digging a canal through the Lahun gap, allowing for more water to flow into the desert edges of the region. The second major expansion took place under the early Ptolemies and increased the cultivatable land to 1300 km\textsuperscript{2} by allowing water to flow more freely to the outskirts of the region. Both expansion episodes resulted in new settlements. During the Ptolemaic period, this coincided with an increased number of immigrants pouring into the country. As a result, much of the Fayum was settled by non-natives, primarily Greek settlers.

In addition to numerous canals there is Lake Moeris, which is fed by the Bahr Yussef, a canal stemming from the Nile River. The lake served as a natural storage facility for the

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{157} \textit{De Vita}, 37.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{158} The connection between water and worship has been explored in Runesson, “Water and Worship,” 115–30.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}
floodwater in the summer months. It was also known to be full of crocodiles and by consequence the Egyptian god Sobek (crocodile god) was worshipped there for much of Egyptian history.

Papyrological and epigraphical evidence suggest that Jews lived in this area as early as the third century BCE. According to Tcherikover, the Jews lived in about thirty different localities, between the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. If true, the area was a popular location for Jewish settlement. This survey will focus on some of the sites for which we have the most information on Jewish communities and in particular those that give insights into their relationships to water.

Figure 4. Map of the Fayum Oasis

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160 This map is adapted thanks to the assistance of Emily Springgay, original from Bagnall and Rathbone, *Egypt*, 128.
1.2.3.1 Arsinoe (Krokodilopolis)\textsuperscript{161} 

Since the Old Kingdom (2649–2150 BCE) this town was known to Egyptians as Shedet or Medinet el-Fayyum. It is here where the Bahr Yusuf ends and the water path is diffused into different branches.\textsuperscript{162} When the Greeks arrived, they named it Krokodilopolis, as it was a cult centre for the worship of Sobek (crocodile god). The name was changed in 116 BCE to Ptolemais Euergetis in honour of the deceased Ptolemy VIII, then in the fourth century CE it was called Arsinoite polis (city of the Arsinoites), later shortened to Arsinoe. Many documentary sources have been found in this region, though most are fragmentary in nature.

One of the earliest attested Jewish communities under the Ptolemies settled in this place. Several inscriptions found here date to the early third century BCE (\textit{C.Pap.Jud.} III 153A; \textit{C.Pap.Jud.} I 126; \textit{C.Pap.Jud.} I 19). At least one \textit{proseuche} was dedicated (\textit{CIJ} III 1532a = JIGRE 117) in the third century BCE, and likely others were built as well.\textsuperscript{163}

\textit{P. Tebt 86r} (= \textit{C.Pap.Jud.} I 134) is a fragmentary land survey from the late second century BCE Arsinoe. The papyrus contains the description of a \textit{proseuche} located on the outskirts of town between the Argaitis canal, the property of Hermoine, and the town boundary. The text reads:

\begin{verbatim}
17,ms β δ’ ις’
προσευ(χή) λι(βός) περίστασις πό(λεως) ἀπη(λιώτου) Ἀργα(ιτίδος) διώρυ(ξ).
17a κβ δ’ ἡ’
17b ε ἡ’ ις’ λβ’ α ἡ’ ις’ λβ’
βο(ρρά) [έχ[ο(μένης)] προσευχής Ἰουδαίων διὰ Πετεσόλου
18a δ δ’ ις’ λβ’ α δ’ δ’ ις’ η’ λβ’ ζ η’ ις’ λβ’
diὰ μι(σθωτοῦ) Πετεσούχου τοῦ Μαρρήους
19a β δ’
20 ἱεράς παρα(δείσου) γ ζ δ’ ις’, [σ]τεφά(νοις) καὶ λαχά(νοις)
α ζ
21a ,msδ ζ δ’ ις’ λβ’
\end{verbatim}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{161} TM 327.
\textsuperscript{162} Bagnall and Rathbone, \textit{Egypt}, 152.
\textsuperscript{163} There are several references to \textit{proseuchai} and one \textit{eucheion} in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods but it is not always clear whether they refer to the same one or various ones.
\end{flushright}
A proseuche, to the west is the city boundary; to the east is the Argaitis canal. To the north of the proseuche represented by Pertollos, and a sacred garden cultivated by a tenant, Petesouchos son of Marres, of 3 13/16 arourai and 1 1/2 arourai planted with flowers and vegetables. Neighbours: to the south Hermione daughter of Apollonides; to the north and west the city boundary; to the east the canal of Argaitis. (C.Pap.Jud. I 134)\(^{165}\)

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\(^{164}\) According to Bonneau, the term διόρυξ is the second most important watercourse in Egypt, next to potamos. The term specifically refers to a canal that is built by people, thus not a naturally formed canal. The main purpose it serves is to bring water from the Nile, or from one of its branches, for distribution in individual fields or areas. As such they play a critical role in the irrigation of the land. Additionally, they help with drainage. See Bonneau, *Le régime administratif de l'eau du Nil*, 13–18.


The passage quoted appears in a larger text that describes the areas surrounding the *proseuche*. To the north of the *proseuche* is a Sarapeion, to the south areas owned by Hermoine and Demetrios. We also learn that all these places are located between the canal and the town boundary.

In this fragment, we are not given any explicit connection between the canal and the *proseuche*. However, it is reasonable to assume that the placement of the *proseuche* was intentional, and that the water was used for ritual purposes, daily needs, and to water the garden. According to Modrzejewski, the *proseuche*’s location at the edge of the town may reflect a desire on the part of Jews to live apart from non-Jews, yet the presence of a Serapeion closeby may negate such a view. Some scholars have suggested that the proximity of worship to water means that the Jews used local water resources (the sea, rivers, canals) as “natural” *mikva’ot* or some other form of ritual washing. This view is further supported by Josephus, who explains that it is the custom of the Jews to build places of worship near the seaside (Josephus, *Ant.*, 14.258). Additionally, as mentioned earlier, the *Letter of Aristeas* describes the Jews washing their hands in seawater before praying (306–308). Moreover, it was common practice among Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans to build places of worship near bodies of water, therefore, the presence of the synagogue on the Argaitis canal provides specific evidence for the view that the Jews wanted to worship near water, and thus seems to indicate that water formed a part of their ritual or religious practices.

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167 It is interesting to find the Sarapeion located directly beside the Jewish *proseuche*. According to the text the Sarapeion occupied less space on its Western side (where the city limits were), suggesting it occupied less space than the *proseuche*. For a full account of the entire text see Grenfell, et al., ed, *The Tebtunis Papyri*, 380–85.

168 Other examples of similarly located Jewish religious places include Schedia’s *proseuche* located just off the Canopic branch of the Nile, the Jewish temple at Elephantine from the Persian period (located in southern Egypt), and the Jewish temple in Leontopolis. The question is whether this was a unique practice for Egyptian Jews or whether it represented a larger trend in the placements of synagogues and other places of worship. Several contemporary Jewish texts not composed in Egypt refer to places of worship that were located near bodies of water. The book of Acts, for example, explains that on the Sabbath day the disciples went “outside the gate by the river” where they assumed a place of prayer was situated (Acts 16:13). Josephus further explains that it is the customs of the Jews to build places of worship near the seaside (Josephus, *Ant.*, 14.258). One reason for this placement may be gleaned from the *Letter of Aristeas* that claims that the Jews washed their hands in seawater before praying (*Let. Aris.* 306–308).

Another fragment dating to 113 CE addresses the water needs of the Jewish community (C.Pap.Jud II 432 = P.Lond III 1177). The text is an account of the water supply for the Arsinoe region including the amounts owed for different users. Column 3 describes the amount of water allocated to two Jewish places of worship, a proseuche and a eucheion.

The text explains that every month, each Jewish place of worship pays a sum of 128 drachmas for its water use. This is a surprising amount when compared to other places found elsewhere in the fragment, such as the bath of Severianus (72 drachmai 18 obols per month), various local fountains (9 obols per day), and the brewery at the Sarapaeion (52 drachmai and 13 obols per month). The Jewish places of worship were paying more than the bath and the local fountains and raises the question as to whether the Jews were using more water than other local facilities. Kasher argues, following the suggestion made by Tcherikover and Fuks, which the Jews used a

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170 Bonneau mentions this papyrus as an example of urban water usage in the Fayum region, Cf. Bonneau, “Usage et usages de l’eau,” 56.

171 Proseuche is the most frequently used term when referring to Jewish places of worship in Egypt. The terms synagogue and eucheion are each only found once in Jewish literary texts composed in Egypt. It is unclear what the difference in this particular case is between the proseuche and the eucheion. Since they are charged the same amount, it suggests they were in the same category of construction.

large amount of water, probably due to ritual practices that required more than usual. Fuks rejected the notion, as most others have as well, that the difference was due to different rates being imposed upon the Jewish community.

According to Anne Fitzpatrick-McKinley, the large amount of water could have been used for the maintenance of a garden. Her claim is predicated on the assumption that the proseuche mentioned in C.Pap.Jud. I 134 is the same as the one mentioned in C.Pap.Jud. II 432, although this is far from conclusive. Yet even if this is the case, this does not explain why both the proseuche and the eucheion were paying the same rate. It does seem, as per Fuks suggestion, that there were different categories that consumers fit into, which explains why the baths are charged the same amount, and the Jewish places of worship were similarly charged the same amount.

A final point that should be raised is the possibility of a large Jewish population in the town, thereby requiring a large amount of water to serve the needs (mundane and religious) of the community. Studies have shown that the Jewish population (even if simply Jewish by

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173 A look at the Theodotus inscription that dates from the period prior to the destruction of the temple in 70 CE illuminates a connection between water and worship in Judea:

Theodotus, son of Vettenus, priest and archisynagogos, son of an archisynagogos, grandson of an archisynagogos, built the synagogue for the reading of Torah and the study of the commandments, and the guest-house and the rooms for the water installations, for the needy travelers from abroad. The foundations of the synagogue were laid by his fathers and the elders and Simonides.

The activities described in connection with the synagogue shed light on the functions of a synagogue in the early Roman period. The reference for rooms for water installations could be a hint as to the use of the water mentioned in C.Pap.Jud. II 432. Were the installations for ritual purposes (ritual bathing or washing)? Or were they more practical (drinking water for example)? For a description of this inscription see Peter Richardson, “Early Synagogues as Collegia in the Diaspora and Palestine,” in Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World (ed. John S. Kloppenborg and Stephen G. Wilson; London: Routledge, 1996), 99.

174 The presence of synagogues, as mentioned in several papyri, reflects an organized Jewish community. Kasher argues, based on his reading of C.Pap.Jud. II 432, that there were two main Jewish communities living in the city, Jews from Thebes (Diospolis Magna) and local Jews. While distinct, they were represented by a common leader who handled their expenses for the water bill. See Kasher, The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt, 140. Also note that C.Pap.Jud. II 421 from 72 CE also refers to a distinction between groups of Jews. In this papyrus, it seems that some Jews had the same status as Egyptians. This difference may also further support Kasher claim about two Jewish communities in reference to C.Pap.Jud. II 432.

heritage only) was very high in surrounding areas such as Trikomia or Samareia.\textsuperscript{176} Possibly, the relatively high rate reflects the amount of water that was needed by this large faction of the community, possibly not only for ritual purposes but possibly for everyday needs as well. The fragment thus offers insights into how water was shared between different cultural groups and the various rates associated with water uses.

\subsection*{1.2.3.2 Trikomia\textsuperscript{177}}

Trikomia is a small village located near the city of Arsinoe. Tax rolls from the third century BCE reveal that the majority of the population was classified as Hellenes.\textsuperscript{178} Yet, as Honigman points out, the designation was indicative of a tax category and was not of ethnic origins.\textsuperscript{179} An analysis of the names listed in the tax rolls reveals that many of these Hellenes were likely Jewish or of Jewish heritage. The onomastic profile reveals many Jewish names among some other groups such as Thracians. Honigman suggests that these Jews arrived early in the third century BCE along with the early Ptolemaic settlement projects.\textsuperscript{180}

With the exception to these names, we have little information about the community itself. One detail we have is that the majority of these Hellenes seem to have been located in the Maron quarter of Trikomia. This is interesting because this is the only specific evidence we have for Jews living in a particular district of a city or town in the Ptolemaic period.\textsuperscript{181}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{177} TM 2470.
\bibitem{179} Honigman, “Jewish Communities in Hellenistic Egypt,” 130.
\bibitem{181} Examples can be found in the Roman period (Alexandria, Oxyrhythchos, Hermopolis Magna). In the Ptolemaic period no explicit references have been found.
\end{thebibliography}
1.2.3.3 Alexandrou-Nesos\textsuperscript{182}

The village of Aleandrou-Nesos is located close to Lake Moeris. Not much is known about the presence of Jews here except in the Ptolemaic period. One papyrus describes the complaint of a woman that a local Jew stole her cloak and she demands payment in return or for the cloak to be returned (\textit{C.Pap.Jud.} I 129 from 218 BCE).\textsuperscript{183} The text references “the proseuche of the Jews” (τῇ προσευχῇ τῶν Ἰουδαίων) and is addressed to the Jewish authorities. Kasher argues that the Jews here had a military presence based on the status of the mediator Lezelmis and the presence of Jews involved in the military in nearby Syrian villages.\textsuperscript{184} Additionally, Kasher suggests that two papyri, \textit{P. Petr} II 29a and \textit{P. Petr} II 43a, that deal with taxes on vineyards indicate that the Jews of Alexandrou-Nesos were involved in viticulture.\textsuperscript{185} The association with Jews, however, is not universally recognized.\textsuperscript{186}

1.2.3.4 Samareia\textsuperscript{187}

The village of Samareia attests to Jewish settlements at least as early as the Ptolemaic period. A papyrus from 201 BCE (\textit{C.Pap.Jud.} I 22) offers some evidence that the Jews in Samareia were military settlers.\textsuperscript{188} The text is a contract drawn up between four Egyptians regarding the cession of a quarter, the witnesses of the contract have Jewish names.\textsuperscript{189} Scholars suggest that this military settlement established itself there at least as early as 225 BCE (with Ptolemy II’s

\begin{tabular}{l}
\textsuperscript{182} TM 105. \\
\textsuperscript{183} \textit{P. Enteuxis} 30; \textit{P.Lille Gr.} II 35; \textit{Chrest. Wilek} 56. \\
\textsuperscript{184} Kasher, \textit{The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt}, 147. This claim is mostly based on the presence of military settlers in nearby Samareia. \\
\textsuperscript{185} This is based on the use of the term Θεοδότου in \textit{P.Petr} II 29a lines 13 and 16 and \textit{P.Petr} II 43a line 24. \\
\textsuperscript{186} The association with Jews is not addressed in an early publication of the papyri in 1891 nor were they included in \textit{C.Pap.Jud.}. \\
\textsuperscript{187} TM 2077. \\
\textsuperscript{188} Kasher, \textit{The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt}, 148. \\
\end{tabular}
settlement project of the Fayum). \[190\] Given the name of the settlement, the original inhabitants may have been from Samaria in Palestine. \[191\] Another papyrus testifies to the prosperity of the settlement in the mid second century BCE (under reign of Ptolemy VI Philometor) (\textit{C.Pap.Jud.} I 28).

1.2.3.5 Magdola (Medinet Nehas) \[192\]

Magdola is a name of Semitic origin that means fort or watchtower. The name is related to the Hebrew \textit{Migdal}. \[193\] At the end of the third century BCE it was the seat of the local \textit{strategos} and as such it was a centre for administration in the region. Several Jewish petitions were found here, but only two originated in Magdola (\textit{C.Pap.Jud.} I 127b; \textit{C.Pap.Jud.} I 128). \[194\] The first petition dates to the reign of Euergetes I (246–222 BCE) or Philopator (222–205 BCE) and deals with a disputed inheritance. The second petition dates to 218 BCE and deals with marital laws. The petition, labeled as “A plaint of a wife against her husband,” references the “civil law of the Jews” in its claim. \[195\] The presence of these petitions demonstrates that the Jews were part of a larger local community, not simply the Jewish community, although they did seem to make special appeals to Jewish customs in some cases in conjunction with local laws.

1.3 Summary of Regional Analysis

This chapter examined the different sites of Egypt in which Jews lived, focusing specifically on how they accessed and experienced the fluvial environment. While some Jews lived along the

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\[190\] Kasher, \textit{The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt}, 148–49.

\[191\] Josephus’ \textit{Ant.} XI 345 and XII 7 may have been referring to such a community.

\[192\] TM 1284.

\[193\] Cf. Exod 14:2; Num 38:7; Jer 44:1; 46:14; Ezek 29:10; 30:6. See also Kasher, \textit{The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt}, 149.

\[194\] Those from outside of Magdola include \textit{C.Pap.Jud.} I 37 (Herakleia); 38 (Arsinoe); 129 (Alexandrou-Nesos).

Nile and experienced large floods, others lived in areas like the fertile Fayum region where water was accessed from the Bahr Yussef and Lake Moeris. Moreover, the northern Delta included more marshy areas than Middle and Upper Egypt, allowing for the growth of produce suited to that particular ecology. Understanding the placement of the Jews in Egypt and how water featured a part of their daily lives allows for the contextualization of specific sources that detail how the Jews actually used water.

In this survey of four hundred years of history, there are certainly changes in the uses and practices of water. I will now highlight three areas in which we can see significant differences between the Jewish communities of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt: Settlement patterns, establishment of communities, and water uses.

1.3.1 Settlement Patterns

Early Ptolemaic settlements of Jews are attested all over Egypt, with what seem to have been more substantial communities in the urban sites of Edfu, Thebes, Alexandria, and Arsinoe. These Jewish communities would have migrated either from Palestine or were descendants from the Elephantine community from the Persian period. Of the nineteen places examined in this survey, sixteen were occupied by Jews in the Ptolemaic period (see Table 1. below). There are only three places not attested until the Roman period: Hermopolis Magna, Oxyrychchos, and Thmuis. In addition to the more populated areas, Jews also lived in smaller towns or villages such as Magdola or Samareia. The evidence thus suggests that Jews lived in both large cities (a metropolis for example) and in smaller villages throughout the Ptolemaic period.

In Roman Egypt, documents for the presence of Jewish communities appear in eight locations (see Table 1. below). Only a handful of locations with evidence from the Roman period are not also attested in the Ptolemaic period: Thmuis, Oxyrychchos, and Hermopolis Magna. While we shouldn’t to draw too much of a conclusion here, as we only have a sampling of data

196 See Bowman and Rogan, Agriculture in Egypt.

197 Due to the nature of the evidence, much of the sources found are urban. We have little evidence for rural Jewish communities in Egypt.
to begin with, this seems to indicate that in many places Jews settled in the Ptolemaic period and most continued to live there into the Roman period. However, there are also several places for which we have evidence in the Ptolemaic but not the Roman period: Alexandrou-Nesos, El-Kanais, Herakleopolis Magna, Hermopolis Magna, Magdola, Memphis, Nitriai, Samareia, Schedia, Thebes, Trikonia, and Xenephyris. The sparcity of the documentary evidence might be to blame here as some of these places are attested in Jewish literary texts (e.g. Schedia, Nitriai).

As was the case in the Roman period, Jews lived in both urban and rural places, both large cities and small villages. In some cases we have indications of Jewish areas of town, such as in Oxyrhynchos and Hermopolis Magna. This could indicate that Jews here were well established and had been living there for much longer than our current evidence attests.

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198 A steady Jewish presence is attested in the cities of Edfu, Alexandria, Athribis, Leontopolis, and Arsinoe.
### Table 1. Summary of Documentary Evidence and Relative Dating for Jewish Settlements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place Name</th>
<th>Relative Dating</th>
<th>Ptolemaic Evidence</th>
<th>Roman Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thebes</td>
<td>4th BCE – 3rd BCE</td>
<td>~300 BCE: <em>Cowley Papyri</em> (no. 81 &amp; 82)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexandrou-Nesos</td>
<td>3rd BCE</td>
<td>~3rd BCE: <em>CPJ I</em> 129</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magdola</td>
<td>3rd BCE</td>
<td>~3rd BCE: <em>CPJ I</em> 127b; I 128</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trikomeia</td>
<td>3rd BCE</td>
<td>~3rd BCE: tax codes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedia</td>
<td>3rd BCE</td>
<td>~3rd BCE: <em>CIJ II</em> 1440</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memphis</td>
<td>3rd BCE – 1st BCE (?)</td>
<td>~Tombstones</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samaria</td>
<td>3rd BCE – 2nd BCE</td>
<td>~3rd BCE: <em>CPJ I</em> 22; ~2nd BCE: <em>CPJ I</em> 28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Edfu</em></td>
<td>3rd BCE – 1st CE</td>
<td>~3rd BCE: Ostraca</td>
<td>~1st CE: <em>CPJ I</em> 139; <em>CPJ II</em> 240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Arsinoe</em></td>
<td>3rd BCE – 2nd CE</td>
<td>~3rd BCE: <em>CPJ III</em> 153a; I 126; I 19; <em>CIJ II</em> 1532a</td>
<td>~2nd CE: <em>CPJ II</em> 432</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xenephryris</td>
<td>2nd BCE</td>
<td>~3rd BCE: <em>CIJ II</em> 1441</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heracleopolis</td>
<td>2nd BCE</td>
<td>~144–132 BCE: <em>P.Polit.Jud</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magna</td>
<td>2nd BCE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nitria</td>
<td>2nd BCE</td>
<td>~2nd BCE: <em>CIJ II</em> 1442</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Alexandria</em></td>
<td>2nd BCE – 1st CE</td>
<td>~2nd BCE: <em>CIJ II</em> 1433; ~1st BCE: <em>CIJ II</em> 1432</td>
<td>~1st CE: <em>CPJ III</em> 518b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Athribis</em></td>
<td>2nd BCE – 2nd CE</td>
<td>~2/1 BCE: <em>CIJ II</em> 1443; II 1444</td>
<td>~2nd CE: <em>CPJ II</em> 448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leontopolis</td>
<td>2nd BCE – 2nd CE (?)</td>
<td>~2nd BCE/2nd CE (?) *CIJ II 1530</td>
<td>~2nd BCE/2nd CE (?) *CIJ II 1530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El-Kanais</td>
<td>1st BCE – 2nd BCE</td>
<td>~1/2 BCE: <em>CIJ II</em> 1537; <em>CIJ II</em> 1538</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxyynchos</td>
<td>1st CE</td>
<td></td>
<td>~1st CE: <em>CPJ II</em> 423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermopolis Magna</td>
<td>2nd CE</td>
<td></td>
<td>~2nd CE: <em>CPJ II</em> 436-444, 446; III 468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thmuis</td>
<td>2nd CE</td>
<td></td>
<td>~2nd CE: <em>CPJ III</em> 452b</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

199 The list of places included in this table and in Table 2 are based on the data provided in this study and are organized by earliest date by site. There is evidence that Jews lived in other places not detailed in this study, but they did not meet my criteria of demonstrating a connection to the fluvial context. Moreover, some texts remain questionable as there is debate about what a reference to a “Jew” looks like in this context. Tcherikover, for example, developed a broad view of Jews and Judaism, as attested in his list of places: *C.Pap.Jud*. III, 197–209.

200 Some texts could be first century BCE Roman, but it is often difficult to discern. For simplicity I have decided to place texts from the first century BCE under the Ptolemaic category, however this is not definitively accurate.

201 Italics indicate that the location has documentary evidence attesting to the Ptolemaic and Roman period.
1.3.2 Establishing Communities

For the Jews of Egypt, it was important to establish places of communal gatherings. All dedicatory inscriptions of *proseuchai* and other places for cultic ceremonies date to the Ptolemaic period. Yet, it is conceivable that they continued to be used into the Roman period. Thus, it seems that the construction of communal places of worship was of paramount importance for the early Jewish communities upon their arrival to Egypt and they continued to be important into the Roman period. An example is the mention of the *proseuche* as a Jewish place in both periods.

Jews were also involved in many different careers in Egypt. In the third century BCE, there were priests, scribes, sages, and commanders. We also have others involved in military service (e.g. Thebes, Samareia). In the Roman period, there are references to trading on the Red Sea (El Kanais), tax collecting (Edfu), riverine trade (Alexandria), and police work (Schedia and Athrabis). The role of Jews in military service seems to have been more prominent under the Ptolemies, whereas trade was more frequently associated with Jews under the Romans.

Finally, while there is one reference to a specifically ‘Jewish’ area of town in the Ptolemaic period (in Memphis), more cases appear in texts from the Roman period. Oxyrynchos

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202 The function and uses of the *proseuchai* has remained a topic for debate in scholarship. Kasher argued that synagogues were modeled after the Jerusalem Temple but not meant to replace it. Lee Levine spends minimal time in his book on the ancient synagogue discussing the similarities between the synagogues and other Greco-Roman associations or places of worship, choosing instead to argue for the distinctiveness of the synagogue. In contrast, Stephen Catto claims that *proseuchai* in Egypt were viewed like other non-Jewish temples or places of worship. Others have suggested that the synagogue/proseuche was more akin to the collegia (Peter Richardson) or structured like a miniature city (Tessa Rajak). Tessa Rajak has also suggested that even though the synagogue was likely a place for education, charity, and adjudicatory functions, the most important function of the synagogue was likely “management of the religious routine of the Jewish year and the Jewish lifecycle” (2002: pp. 35–36). Aryeh Kasher, “Synagogues as ‘Houses of Prayer’ and ‘Holy Places’ in the Jewish Communities of Hellenistic and Roman Egypt,” in *Ancient Synagogues: Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery* (ed. Dan Urman and Paul V. M. Flesher; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 205–20; Stephen K. Catto, *Reconstructing the First-Century Synagogue: A Critical Analysis of Current Research* (New York: T & T Clark, 2007); Levine, Lee I. *The Ancient Synagogue. The First Thousand Years* (2d edition; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Peter Richardson, “Early Synagogues as Collegia in the Diaspora and Palestine,” in *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World* (ed. J. S. Kloppenborg and S. G. Wilson; London: Routledge, 1996), 90–109; Tessa Rajak, “The Synagogue within the Greco-Roman City,” in *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue: Cultural Interaction during the Greco-Roman Period* (ed. S. Fine; London: Routledge, 1999), 143–53; eadem, “Synagogue and Community in the Graeco-Roman Diaspora,” in *Jews in the Hellenistic and Roman Cities* (ed. John R. Bartlett; London: Routledge, 2002), 22–38; Donald D. Binder’s work on synagogues in the Second Temple period offers a rich listing of those in Egypt: *Into the Temple Courts: The Place of the Synagogues in the Second Temple Period* (Atlanta: SBL, 1997), 233–54; for a more recent sourcebook see Anders Runesson, Donald D. Binder, and Birger Olsson, ed., *The Ancient Synagogue from its Origins to 200 C.E.* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).
and Hermopolis Magna refer to Jewish streets and Alexandria mentions Jews in the Delta quarter. The grouping together of established Jewish community speaks to the importance of their heritage in establishing and maintaining communities.

1.3.3 Water Uses

The involvement of Jews in riverine or sea trade is documented in the Roman period. At Edfu, the Jews were required to pay a bath-tax, dyke-tax, as were all others considered ‘Egyptian’ in Roman Egypt, and a tax on ship cargo travelling on the river. At El Kanais, a Jew was seemingly involved in the trade across the Red Sea (CIJ II 1537). Finally, a controversial text from Alexandria refers to riverine trading of state grain (C.Pap.Jud. III 518b).

Moreover, the uses of water in documentary sources are not specifically tied to religious practice. The taxes at Edfu are for baths, dykes, and trade, not particular taxes for Jews. The water bill at Arsinoe (C.Pap.Jud. II 432) does not indicate what the water was used for. While scholars suggest it was for ritual purposes, the text itself is ambiguous. The location of places of worship to bodies of water (C.Pap.Jud. I 134) suggest a connection between water and worship, but again it is not explicit. However, references found in literary sources do sometimes mention water being used in religious settings. For example, the Letter of Aristeas mentions hand washing before praying and Philo refers to the Therapeutae’s practice of only drinking pure spring water. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to see how the Jews may have used water for ritual purposes in their daily lives.

Lastly, Jewish communities, much like other communities in Egypt, were established in areas where water was plentiful. The Jews were located strategically along the Nile, in the fertile Fayum, or in the Delta to ensure their survival in the mostly desertic land of Egypt.

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1.4 Conclusion

In her 1992 article “Usage et usages de l’eau dans l’Égypte ptolémaïque et romaine,” Danielle Bonneau outlines a thematic approach to water usage in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt. While the article is incomplete, due to her untimely and sudden passing, the editors included a list of notes consisting of the different thematic categories that she divided the evidence of uses of water from the Ptolemies to the Byzantine period. She outlines ten different themes related to the usage of water ranging from the sale of water to the rights to water to its distribution:

1. Nile and the Notion of Space
2. Navigation Routes
3. Sale of Water
4. Urban Water
5. Historical Uses of Water
6. Right to Water
7. Private Rights and Communal Water
8. Distribution of Water
9. Organization and Uses of Water
10. Negative Uses of Water

Her list provides a nice categorization of the evidence available for the inhabitants of Egypt under Ptolemaic and Roman rule. What this listing reveals is the lack of evidence available to us for understanding Jewish engagements with water through documentary evidence in comparison with Greek and Egyptian sources. As a result, in order to gain a more robust picture of Jewish interactions with the environment, we must turn to literary texts and see how they shed more light on the question.

The aim of this chapter was to provide a framework for thinking about Jews within their environmental context. While we do not have nearly as much evidence as we desire, the available texts do offer insights into the Jewish experience in Egypt, one informed by the hydric


\[205\] This category emphasizes the importance of looking at the historical usages of water and how they have influenced later uses. She also discusses water rights as they have developed in different periods of time under this same category.
environment. In the next chapter, I will discuss how the exodus narratives composed in Egypt draw upon elements of the environment in their accounts. The Jews of Egypt were not only engaged with the physical world, it was also part of the larger understanding of their Jewish heritage.
Chapter 2

2 Features of the Exodus Narratives of Hellenistic and Roman Egypt

2.1 Introduction

The story of the Israelite exodus out of Egypt circulated widely throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Evidence of its importance to Judaism in the Second Temple period can be seen in the annual celebration of the feast of Passover and the textual transmission of the narrative. By the Second Temple period, Passover was commemorated annually through a feast that recounted the events of the journey from bondage to freedom, a practice that has continued until today. Moreover, its importance can be seen when we examine texts that repeatedly recount or draw upon this foundational narrative. In the Second Temple period, both Jews and non-Jews connected versions of this story to Jews. The ubiquity of the story can be seen by the presence of different editions of the text of Exodus as well as the recasting of its major events in a variety of different genres of writings that often provide new interpretations of its meaning.

At least five versions of the exodus story were composed in Egypt. In the Ptolemaic period, we have the LXX Exodus dated to the third century BCE, as well as Artapanus’ On the

1 An early attestation from the Persian period of the celebration of Passover can be found in an Elephantine papyri called B13, discussed later in this chapter.

2 Twenty-one different fragments attesting to parts of the book of Exodus were found at Qumran: 1QExod, 2QExod(a), 2QExod(b), 2QExod(c), 4QGen-Exod(a), 4QpaleoGen-Exod(1), 4QExod(b), 4QExod(c), 4QExod(d), 4QExod(e), 4QExod-Lev(f), 4QExod(g), 4QExod(h), 4QExod(j), 4QExod(k), 4QpaleoExod(m), 4QDeut(j) cols. IX-X (Exod 12, 13), 4QBib Par = 4QRP(a), 4QRP(b), 4QRP(c), and 4QRP(d). For a complete list of all the texts believed to belong to the book of Exodus, see Emmanuel Tov, Revised Lists of the Texts from the Judaean Desert (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 114–15.


4 While there are many historical fallacies contained within the Letter of Aristeas, most scholars place the translation of the LXX in the second century BCE under the reign of Ptolemy II. Nina L. Collins, The Library in
Jews and Ezekiel the Tragedian’s *Exagoge*, both dated roughly to the second century BCE. Under Roman rule, we have the *Wisdom of Solomon* and Philo’s *Life of Moses*, both dated to the early to mid first century CE. Each of these exodus accounts shows a familiarity with the LXX version yet departs in terms of genre, themes, terminology, and narrative details.⁵ Albeit very different from one another, they all share several distinct features that connect them with a particular place, the land of Egypt: (1) a greater emphasis on the experiences within Egypt, (2) the primary characterization of Moses as a leader (and not necessarily as a lawgiver), and (3) explanatory descriptions of the physical environment. This chapter will argue that writing in the place of Egypt had a role in shaping these Jewish narratives of the exodus. Through an examination of how place shapes compositions we can gain insight into the negotiation between past and present, and better understand Egyptian Judaism as situated in a particular physical context.

While non-canonical versions of the exodus have been known and studied for centuries,⁶ the majority of scholarship on the exodus narrative has focused on the book of Exodus.⁷ Its canonical status has elevated it to a level of importance in discussions of the history and reception of the story. These non-canonical versions, as a result, have often been viewed in light

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⁵ Honigman, *The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria*; Rajak, *Translation and Survival*.

⁶ The writings of Artapanus and Ezekiel the Tragedian have long been known to scholars through the writings of Eusebius (and Clement). The writings of Philo of Alexandria were preserved by the church fathers, and first published in English in 1854 in four volumes (Charles Duke Yonge, *The Works of Philo Judaeus, the Contemporary of Josephus, Translated from the Greek* [London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854–1855]). The *Wisdom of Solomon* remains among the apocryphal texts and was translated by Samuel Holmes in R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English: With Introductions and Critical and Explanatory Notes to the Several Books* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 518–68.

of their similarity to LXX Exodus. However, the non-canonical texts offer more than a comparison with the LXX, they can also illuminate other Second Temple texts (e.g. Jubilees, Ps-Philo’s LAB, etc), and shed light on the interpretation of authoritative Jewish literature in Egypt. With the publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the recognition of the fluidity of the canon in the Second Temple period, there has been a growing interest in the study of these texts, historically lesser known due to their non-canonical status. It is this momentum that I build upon in my exploration of how place shaped the formation of Jewish narratives.

2.2 The Many Exodus Narratives of Antiquity

References to the exodus story can be found throughout Early Jewish Literature. Before looking specifically at the narratives from Egypt, an overview of the different accounts of the exodus story in the Second Temple period will provide the necessary contextualization of the Jewish Egyptian accounts. This overview will not only focus on texts dedicated to the account, but will also include texts that deal minimally with the story. Within the Hebrew Bible, for example, the departure from Egypt is referenced multiple times throughout texts such as Deuteronomy, Joshua, Isaiah, and the Psalms. The Deuteronomistic literature refers to God as the one who brought his people out of Egypt. Psalm 105 (106 LXX) mentions the ten plagues and Psalm 135 explains that God struck down those living in Egypt. The role of the divine in the Sea of Reeds account is explained in Psalm 77:13, “He broke asunder a sea and brought them through; made waters stand like a wineskin.” The event is also invoked in Prophetic texts. Isaiah 63

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8 See for example texts within Old Testament Pseudepigrapha that contain discussions devoted to a text’s similarity to the language of the LXX.

9 There has been an increase in the number of publications on Artapanus’ On the Jews and Ezekiel the Tragedian’s Exagoge in the past ten years. Moreover, several panels at the Society of Biblical Literature have been devoted to these texts in particular.

10 For detailed examination of the Exodus tradition throughout the Hebrew Bible, see Loewenstamm, The Evolution of the Exodus Tradition.

11 Specifically the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, and Judges are replete with examples.

12 Translations of passages from the LXX are taken from NETS unless otherwise noted (Albert Pietersma, ed., A New English Translation of the Septuagint, and the Other Greek Translations Tradition ally Included Under that Title (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
describes the crossing of the Sea of Reeds (Moses “led them through the deep like a horse through a wilderness”). Other prophetic texts, such as Hosea, Amos, and Jeremiah, mention God as the deliverer of his people.\textsuperscript{13}

Examples of texts from the Persian and Hellenistic periods that preserve the narrative include the Samaritan Pentateuch and the book of Jubilees. The Samaritan Pentateuch follows MT closely, but departs concerning the actions of Aaron and Moses.\textsuperscript{14} The book of Jubilees offers a summary of the exodus narrative in its sweeping retelling of the books of Genesis and Exodus from the perspective of the angel on Mount Sinai. Both Artapanus and Ezekiel the Tragedian recast the story, infusing it with new details. Brief mentions of the account also appear in the book of Judith, 3 Maccabees and the Letter of Aristeas.\textsuperscript{15} While references are sometimes subtle, Jewish authors often assume awareness of the story on the part of their audience.

In the Roman period, Josephus summarized the exodus in the second book of Antiquities of the Jews. In this book, he covers events from the death of Isaac to the crossing of the Sea of Reeds. Philo of Alexandria similarly narrates the exodus primarily in the Life of Moses, yet references also appear in his On Dreams and On the Contemplative Life. While Philo interprets the exodus allegorically, in Life of Moses he follows the basic chronology of narrative as presented in the LXX.\textsuperscript{16} The Wisdom of Solomon spends the second half of the book weaving together elements from the exodus out of Egypt with the Israelites wanderings in the desert.\textsuperscript{17} Rather than follow a chronological order, the account is focused on drawing a contrast between the Jews and the Egyptians. Finally, the Sibylline Oracles also contain various references to the exodus event.

\textsuperscript{13} Perhaps notably, the exodus story is not found in first Isaiah or Proverbs.

\textsuperscript{14} A version of the exodus can also be found in the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP) that deviates slightly from MT. The SP has several sections that are not found in MT, such as Exod 7:18, 7:29.

\textsuperscript{15} Honigman calls the Letter of Aristeas the Book of Aristeas, which she argues is more accurate since it is more than a letter. Sylvie Honigman, The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria (London: Routledge, 2003). Also, Benjamin Wright has argued that the Letter of Aristeas can be understood as playing with themes from the exodus story. See Benjamin G. Wright, The Letter of Aristeas: Aristeas to Philocrates or On the Translation of the Law of the Jews (Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature 8; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015).

\textsuperscript{16} On Philo’s allegorical interpretation of the Exodus, see Pearce, The Land of the Body.

\textsuperscript{17} Enns, Exodus Retold; Cheon, The Exodus Story in the Wisdom of Solomon.
The exodus account also appears in non-Jewish literature.\textsuperscript{18} Several texts preserve what scholars have labeled the “exodus expulsion” narrative due to some notable differences from the Jewish accounts.\textsuperscript{19} In this version, rather than having the Egyptians enslaving the Israelites, the Jews instead terrorize the Egyptians and are eventually driven out of the land. Manetho’s account\textsuperscript{20} (third century BCE) claims that the king of Egypt gathered all the diseased people and force them to work at the quarries, later they assembled in the abandoned city of Avaris (sacred city to Typhon/Seth) where they appointed Osarsiph as their leader (priest of Heliopolis, later named Moses) who forbade them from worshipping like the Egyptians. The people led by Moses (Osarsiph) rebelled against the Egyptians and drove them into exile for thirteen years, pillaging the land of Egypt. Hecataeus of Abdera (fourth century BCE) similarly mentions a plague and the expulsion of the non-Egyptians in an effort to appease the gods.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{18} Scholars have also been interested in the non-Jewish accounts of the Exodus. In the 1970s, John Gager wrote about the non-Jewish accounts of Moses (Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism). In his monograph he explained the different ways in which Moses was depicted outside of Jewish sources. A more recent article has been published by Pieter W. van der Horst that asks why it was the exodus story (and not another account) that was repeatedly cast in non-Jewish texts: “From Liberation to Expulsion: The Exodus in Earliest Jewish-Pagan Polemics,” in Israel’s Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective, Quantitative Methods in the Humanities and Social Sciences, 387–96.


The article by Gruen and the subsequent responses each engage with the non-Jewish exodus narratives and how we should approach them. Gruen suggests that an alternative to trying to distinguish them as pro-Jewish or anti-Jewish is to focus on the developments which appeared in the Exodus narratives (the apparent two traditions) were not the result of non-Jews transforming the narrative to meet their needs, rather, they developed in-house as Jews tried to explain why they returned to Egypt. Modrzejewski agrees that the dichotomy between pro and anti-Jewish is false and unhelpful, though he does recognize that a statement that begins as an insult can become a claim to fame. The Exodus-expulsion narrative is not an evil parody created by non-Jews, but may reflect several Jewish ideas. Finally, the Jewish plot of the Exodus-expulsion narrative was either influenced by Greek flavor or took the Egyptian tradition of the expulsion of the impure to a level where it was beyond recognizable to the Jews. Louis H. Feldman agrees that it is not productive to think only in terms of pro- versus anti-Jewish writers. Also, he agrees that the LXX was certainly known outside of Jewish communities. His main critique is the allowance for flexibility in retelling the narrative. He says that since Philo, Josephus, and Letter of Aristeas show veneration for the LXX and emphasize that no one should alter or take away from the text, this means that no one did. This is not convincing when you look at all the various ways in which Jews did engage with the tradition.

\textsuperscript{20} Josephus, \textit{C. Ap.}, 1.75–105, 1.227–250, specifically see his exodus account in 1.203–205. See also Gager, Moses, 113–17. For some personal details on Manetho see Plutarch, \textit{De Is. et Os.}, 354C–D, 362A.

\textsuperscript{21} His entire work, \textit{Aegyptiaca} has disappeared, what remains are a few brief references in later writings. See Diod.Sic. 1.46.8; Diog. Laert. 1.9ff; Plutarch, \textit{De Is. et Os.} 354 C–D; Photius, \textit{Bibliotheca}, 244. See also Gager, Moses, 26.
In the Roman period, Strabo (first century BCE/CE) claimed that Moses was originally an Egyptian priest who became frustrated with the religious practices of his day and migrated (along with his followers) to Jerusalem. For Strabo’s contemporary Lysimachus (first century CE), the Jews were diseased and terrorized the Egyptians until they were finally expelled and found a new home in Jerusalem. Other examples include Lysimachus, Apion, and Charemon, who focus on the contamination of the people and their leader Moses. These non-Jewish authors from diverse origins reveal the associations between the exodus and the Jews from outside of the Jewish community. As a formative narrative, the exodus explains how the Jews came to settle in Jerusalem and that, for at least a period of their history, they lived in Egypt. The story was thought to reveal something about the character of the Jews. For example, their rebellious nature is characterized through the figure of Moses (Manetho) or that they are an organized people thanks to Moses’ administrative prowess (Hecataeus of Abdera).

The variety of exodus accounts present in the Hellenistic and Roman periods demonstrates the fluid and dynamic nature of the story. Despite its importance and centrality for Jews, shown most clearly by its ubiquity, it remained open for interpretation. Even though the book of Exodus was authoritative as early as the third century BCE, this did not prevent Jews from recasting the narrative, including their own embellishments, explanations, or even deletions.

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23 For discussions on Lysimachus, see Josephus, *C. Ap.*, 1.304–311, 2.145. See also Gager, *Moses*, 118–20. Another contemporary, Pompeius Trogus explained that the Egyptians were afflicted with diseases, so they banished Moses and other diseased people (to prevent it from spreading further) (*Historiae Philippicae* 36.2.16). Moses led the exiles out of Egypt and they went to Damascus, stopping at Mount Sinai on the way. See Gager, *Moses*, 48–56.

24 For the writings of Charemon see Josephus, *C. Ap.*, 1.288–292. Also Gager, *Moses*, 122–24. As a Hellenized Egyptian priest and a Stoic intellectual, Chaeremon’s account was more mythical that other narratives. He explains that Isis told the king to purge the land of the contaminated people. As they were leaving they joined forces with would be immigrants at Pelusium and decided to invade the land. They drove the king to Ethiopia, eventually the king’s son drove the Jews to Syria and restored his father.
2.3 The Exodus narratives from Egypt

As scholars in the field of Human Geography have pointed out, there is a deep connection between people and place.25 Yi-Fu Tuan, among others, understands place as part of the human experience. In this view, place is not an abstraction but is intimately connected to one’s identity. For the Jews living in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, the land of Egypt became their place. This is perhaps most clearly articulated by Philo who claimed that Alexandria was his fatherland, while Judea was his motherland.26 The Jews of Egypt did not live in constant yearning for return to Judea, rather, they embraced their lives in Egypt. Moreover, Egypt became a key part of their identity, as we can see through the writing of the exodus narratives.

This section will offer a comparative reading of the four exodus narratives composed in Egypt and suggest that there are three features that tie them to the land of Egypt. I will open with a discussion of two critical events regarding the presence of the book of Exodus in Egypt: (1) The Elephantine Jews and the celebration of Passover, and (2) The translation of the LXX in Alexandria. The early appearance of the exodus in Egypt helped establish the groundwork for the presence of different versions of the exodus in later periods. Subsequently, I will demonstrate through a comparative textual analysis that these texts share characteristics that situate them in the physical environment, and not only the social or cultural environment, of Egypt.

The earliest material evidence for the book of Exodus in Egypt appears in a 419/418 BCE Aramaic letter found in Elephantine. This fragment, known as the Passover Letter, details the celebration of Passover by the Jewish community living in Egypt under Persian rule.

25 Tuan, Topophilia; idem, Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977); Tim Cresswell, Place: A Short Introduction (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2004); idem, Place: An Introduction (2d edition; Chichester, West Sussex; Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015).

26 Philo, Leg., 281–282. Andrea Lieber examines the concept of diaspora in Philo’s writings and specifically his relationship to Jerusalem. She argues that “Philo consistently attaches a positive valence to the Jewish dispersion, and in this respect develops a theology of diaspora that actually legitimates Jewish settlement in diverse locations” (Andrea Lieber, “Between Motherland and Fatherland: Diaspora, Pilgrimage and the Spiritualization of Sacrifice in Philo of Alexandria,” in Heavenly Tablets: Interpretation, Identity and Tradition in Ancient Judaism [ed. Lynn LiDonnici and Andrea Lieber; Leiden: Brill, 2007], 195). She also points out that Philo uses Greek colonial language in articulating the relationship between Jerusalem and the diaspora. In Flaccus 46, Philo explains that Jews see Jerusalem as their mother-city (μητρόπολις) and that those living in the diaspora see their land as fatherland (πατρίδας). Therefore placing a positive spin on diaspora life for Jews.
Quoting from the Hebrew book of Exodus, the celebration of Passover mentioned in this letter shows that the exodus narrative was used in Jewish ritual life in Egypt under Persian rule. The text gives us a glimpse into what it was like to be a diasporic Jew in Persian Egypt. For these Jews it was of paramount importance that they followed the Passover instructions as laid out in the book of Exodus.

A second major event is the translation of the Torah into Greek in the third century BCE. According to the legendary account provided by the Letter of Aristeas, seventy scribes were responsible for the translation of the LXX. Each translated separately but miraculously ended up with the exact word for word text. While scholars debate several details provided by Aristeas’ fanciful tale, most agree that there was a Greek translation in Egypt in the third century BCE. As Greek was the language used by the royal house, high administration, and élite in Ptolemaic Egypt, the LXX became the Torah *par excellence* for the local Jews.

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The quotation from the book of Exodus in Elephantine and the translation of the LXX in Alexandria demonstrate the early presence and ritual liveliness of the exodus story in Egypt. The four exodus texts composed in Egypt build on this historical legacy. I will turn now to a discussion of three features in the Jewish-Egyptian exodus narratives that stem from their shared sense of place. First, there is more of an emphasis on life in Egypt than on the escape from Egypt. Second, Moses is primarily cast as an exemplary leader and only secondarily as a lawgiver. Third, the environment of Egypt is described in more detail, demonstrating an awareness of the geography of the land.

2.3.1 The Focus on Experiences in Egypt

For the exodus narratives composed in Egypt, the story was not only about the departure from Egypt, but it was about life in Egypt. This feature must be seen as resulting from the reality of the Jews of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, who understood their narrative of escape in light of their contemporary situation. In the book of Exodus, the escape from Egypt (chapters 14–15) divides the book. Half is devoted to the time spent in Egypt and the other half post-exodus, including wilderness wanderings and the events at Sinai. The prevailing message about Egypt is that it was a negative time in Jewish history. In the first chapter, Pharaoh is murdering their children, they work as slaves, and almost as quickly as they are released Pharaoh changes his mind and instead inflicts harsher punishments upon them. The overall picture of Egypt is not one of bounty and prosperity, but struggle and death. The celebratory atmosphere following the crossing of the Sea of Reeds exemplifies the negative image of Egypt: “Let us sing to the Lord, for gloriously he has glorified himself; horse and rider he threw into the sea” (Exod 15:1). God is

far as we know he was the first Jewish historian who wrote in the Greek language and wrote during the reign of Ptolemy IV Philopator (222–205 BCE) (Modrzejewski, The Jews of Egypt, 61).

31 A recent article by René Bloch has similarly explored the question of writing the Exodus in Egypt. He focuses on Philo’s narration of the burning bush account. In contrast to the LXX, in the conversation between God and Moses, it is not mentioned where specifically Moses will lead the people. This suggests that Philo was more interested in life in Egypt than on life beyond the land. This claim is bolstered by readings of Wisdom of Solomon and Ezekiel the Tragedian that suggest similar views towards Egypt. This article offers a helpful starting point for my discussion on writing the exodus in Egypt. (Bloch, “Leaving Home: Philo of Alexandria on the Exodus,” 357–64).
praised once the Israelites have safely crossed the sea. They also celebrate the death of their enemies, the Egyptians, who were drowned by a giant wave.

In addition to the negative portrayal of Egypt, the book of Exodus also repeatedly points towards the land of Canaan. In Exodus 3:7–8, God acknowledges the cries of the people and tells them that he “came down to deliver them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them out of that land and to bring them into a good and spacious land, into a land flowing with milk and honey.” Elsewhere the Abrahamic promise is reiterated, “I will bring you into the land for which I stretched out my hand to give it to Abraam and Isaak and Iakob, and I will give it to you by allotment” (Exod 6:8). Repeatedly, the role of God in bringing the people out of bondage is recalled, especially in the injunctions to “Keep remembering this day in which you came out of Egypt, from a house of slavery. For by a mighty hand the Lord brought you out from there. And leaven shall not be eaten” (Exod 13:3).

In contrast to this negative portrayal of Egypt, the exodus narratives from Egypt paint a different image of life in Egypt. In On the Jews, Artapanus spends the majority of the text describing life in Egypt.32 Surprisingly, the future life outside of Egypt is only mentioned once. In the episode of the burning bush, Artapanus explains:

Τὸν δὲ Μώϋσον δείσαντα τὸ γεγονὸς φεύγειν. Φωνὴν δ᾽ αὐτῷ θείαν εἶπεν στρατεύειν ἐπ᾽ Αἴγυπτον καὶ τοὺς Ἰουδαίους διασώσαντα εἰς τὴν ἀρχαίαν ἀγαγεῖν πατρίδα

Moses was afraid of what had happened, and fled. But a divine voice bade him campaign against Egypt, rescue the Jews, and lead them to their ancient homeland (Praep. Ev. 9.27.21)33

This sole reference to the mission of Moses marks a significant departure from the LXX Exodus. Rather than focus on the escape, the focus is on life in Egypt and Moses’ role in leading his

32 For a critical edition of Artapanus see Holladay, Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors. Volume I. See also Collins, ““Reinventing Exodus.”
33 Translations of Artapanus, unless otherwise noted, are taken from Collins, “Artapanus,” in OTP vol. 2, 889–903.
people. The conclusion of the excerpt, at least according to Eusebius’ rendering of Artapanus’ version, is also illuminating insofar as it ends with a description of Moses (following the crossing of the Sea of Reeds). There is no mention of Sinai, the wilderness wanderings, or the promised land. The focus falls squarely on their time spent in Egypt.

The ending of Ezekiel the Tragedian’s Greek tragedy of the exodus also concludes before Sinai. While we only have about one third of the entire text, the remaining fragments focus on the time spent in Egypt like we saw in Artapanus. There is considerable debate about the ending of the text, which may have continued with their journey into the promised land. Some argue that it ends, as it does with Eusebius, with the crossing of the Red Sea and the description of the Phoenix. Others have suggested that it was originally a longer piece. While we may never know for certain where the ending lies, the majority of the text does take place in Egypt. It opens with an explanation as to how they arrived in Egypt (vv. 1–3), then continues with their plight under Pharaoh (vv. 4–13), Moses’ birth and childhood (vv. 14–38), the plagues (vv. 132–174), and their escape (vv. 193–242). Similar to Artapanus, there is little emphasis on a promised land or to where they will escape. The promise of land, emphasized throughout the LXX, does not seem to carry the same weight of importance in this text. If we imagine this tragedy being performed on the stage for Egyptian Jews, then it seems that the story is more focused on the triumph of good over evil (the Israelites over the Egyptians) rather than the journey to Palestine.

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34 Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors. Volume I.*, 192: “Throughout this fragment, Moses emerges not as the lawgiver of the Jews, as he does, for example, in Eupolemus, Aristobulus, Philo, or Josephus, but as hero and thaumaturge who accomplishes marvelous, it not magical feats, and never meets defeat.”


36 For a full discussion see Robertson, *OTP vol. 2*, 818 n. t3. Trencsényi-Waldapfel for example thought there was a scene reuniting Moses and Sephora. (*OTP vol. 2*, 818).

37 Jacobson, *Ezekiel*, 112: Ezekiel’s “emphasis is not so much on coming to the promised land as on the escape from the place of persecution.” He further points out that Ezekiel mentions a future destination in 154 and 167 but never refers specifically to Israel. Jacobson concludes that this is the case because Israel was not under Ptolemaic rule at the time of the text’s composition (9).

Philo’s *Life of Moses* similarly focuses on experiences within Egypt. The entire first book is devoted to this part of the narrative, from the birth of Moses to the crossing of the Sea of Reeds (Exodus 1–15). Unlike the negative portrayal of the land of Egypt found in the LXX, Philo’s Egypt is different. First of all, unlike the Septuagint, it is a much more pleasant place to live. When the plagues descend upon the land, Philo makes a point to say that the plagues did not touch the Hebrews.

\[\text{o\;\pi\;\tau\;\alpha\;\mu\;\sigma\;\epsilon\;\imath\;\alpha\;\mu\;\mu\;\tau\;\alpha\;\lambda\;\beta\;\alpha\;\lambda\;\nu\;\epsilon\;\iota\;\mu\;\tau\;\eta\;\tau\;\iota\;\epsilon\;\mu\;\iota\;\sigma\;\tau\;\iota\;\nu\;\epsilon\;\iota\;\mu\;\tau\;\iota\;\nu\;\epsilon\;\iota\;\mu\;\tau\;\eta\;\iota\;\nu\;\iota\;\alpha\;\iota\;\mu\;\sigma\;\tau\;\iota\;\iota\;\iota\;\iota.}\]

The river changed to blood, but not for the Hebrews; for, when they wished to draw from it, it turned into good drinking-water. (*Mos.*, 1.144)\(^{39}\)

This is probably to clear up the ambiguous LXX account that mentions nothing of the sort. In the book of Exodus, the only plague that does not touch the Hebrews is the final plague, which is averted due to the practice of placing blood upon the doorframes. Philo’s account not only clarifies the LXX account of what happened during the plagues, but also creates a rosier picture of life in Egypt.

Another example of the focus on Egypt appears in the burning bush account. According to the LXX, the passage looks forward to a future destination. As Bloch has pointed out regarding this pericope, Philo does not reference here a future outside of Egypt, but instead dwells on life in Egypt. The reason provided by Bloch is that for Philo, among others such as Ezekiel the Tragedian and the *Wisdom of Solomon*, life in Egypt was more important than that outside of Egypt.\(^{40}\) A comparative reading of the LXX and Philo will be useful in illuminating this point:


καὶ κατέβην ἐξελέσθαι αὐτοὺς ἐκ χειρὸς Αἰγυπτίων καὶ ἐξαγαγεῖν αὐτοὺς ἐκ τῆς γῆς ἐκείνης καὶ εἰσαγαγεῖν αὐτοὺς εἰς γῆν ἁγαθὴν καὶ πολλὴν, εἰς γῆν βέουσαν γάλα καὶ μέλι, εἰς τὸν τόπον τῶν Χαναναίων καὶ Χετταίων καὶ Ἀμορραίων καὶ Φερεζαίων καὶ Γεργεσαίων καὶ Ευαίων καὶ Ιεβουσαίων.

And I came down to deliver them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them out of that land and to bring them into a good and spacious land, into a land flowing with milk and honey, into the place of the Chananites and Chettites and Amorrites and Pherezites and Heuites and Gergesites and lебousites. (Exod 3:8)

In verse 8 there is an explicit reference to where the Israelites will be going once they leave Egypt. Compare this with Philo’s rendering of the same exchange between Moses and God when Moses is being called to lead the Hebrew people:

Τὸ τεράστιον τοῦτο καὶ τεθαυματουργημένον δείξας ὁ θεὸς τῷ Μωυσεί, παραίνεσιν ἐναργεστάτην τῶν μελλόντων ἀποτελεῖσθαι, καὶ διὰ χρησμών ἄρχεται προτρέπειν αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ ἔθνους σπεύδειν ἐπιμέλειαν, ὡς οὐ μόνον ἐλευθερίας παραίτιον ἄλλα καὶ ἡγεμόνα τῆς ἐνθένδε ἀποικίας οὐκ εἰς μακρὰν γενησόμενον, ὠμολογῶν ἐν ἀπασί.

After showing to Moses this miraculous portent, so clearly warning him of the events that were to be, God begins in oracular speech to urge him to take charge of the nation with all speed, in the capacity not merely of an assistant to their liberation, but of the leader who would shortly take them from Egypt to another home. He promised to help him in everything. (Mos., 1.71)

As Bloch points out, there is something critical missing in Philo’s account.41 Almost shockingly, Moses is not told where to take his people. One hint as to why can be found in Philo’s literary aims. As Sarah Pearce has argued, Philo’s exodus account should be understood as a metaphor for the migration of the soul. It is not about the Israelites specifically, but about the personal journey of the sage. Nevertheless, the lack of mention of the promised land marks a significant

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departure from the LXX. For Philo, therefore, being in the land is more important than getting out of the land.⁴²

The *Wisdom of Solomon* upon first glance does not seem all too interested in Egypt. It is written from the perspective of Solomon’s pseudonymous voice. The biblical figure of Solomon spent no time in Egypt, although he traded with them and had Egyptian women in his household. Yet, the final chapters that detail the exodus account show an interest in the land of Egypt. While each negative plague that hits the Egyptians is contrasted with some benefit to the Israelites, the book of *Wisdom* emphasizes that life in Egypt was not all that bad for the Jews, in a similar vein as we saw previously with Philo. There were moments of pain and struggle, (i.e. throwing babies into the Nile), but the Egyptians were always punished for such actions, showing the ultimate power of the divine. Even though this book spends little time focusing on Egypt, it bears similarities with the writings of Philo in that it emphasizes how the Egyptians were ultimately punished and suffered for their actions, while the Israelites were blessed and rewarded. Therefore, being in the land of Egypt is not inherently unpleasant, as long as you worship the correct deity.

Comparatively speaking, the exodus narratives composed outside of Egypt do not deal with the time spent in Egypt to any great extent. One example is *Jubilees*, which gives a very brief account of the time in Egypt (*Jub*. 47–49). Taking place on Sinai, it is clear that the author is more concerned with the giving of the Law than with life in Egypt, which is reflected in the brief accounting of Exodus 1–15. Pseudo-Philo’s similarly short account describes the time spent in Egypt in seven verses (*LAB* 10.1–7). The entire work gives an accounting of Jewish history from Adam to King Saul. Yet, the emphasis of the text is not on the time spent in Egypt, which appears only as a brief moment in a much larger story.

For the exodus narratives composed in Egypt, Egyptian experiences were compositionally more significant. This reflects how their authors used—consciously or not—their own situation as a lens for reconstructing the past. Not only was it important for them to

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⁴² As Bloch points out, this is also the case with Ezekiel and *Wisdom of Solomon*, neither emphasize the escape. (Bloch, “Leaving Home,” 362–64). See also Jacobson, *Ezekiel*, 9–12.
describe and take seriously the events that involved their ancestors in Egypt, but they also wanted, be it in a subtle way, to show that Egypt was not necessarily a bad place for Jews to live.

2.3.2 Moses the Exemplary Leader

Being the main character of the exodus story, Moses was well known in antiquity, mostly for his role as a lawgiver. As the Deuteronomist emphasizes throughout the Hebrew Bible, Moses was important for his role as a lawgiver and prophet. His association with the law is emphasized repeatedly in the book of Deuteronomy, Jubilees, and Philo. However, in several of the texts composed in Egypt, Moses’s role as lawgiver is eclipsed by his leadership abilities. According to Artapanus and Philo, Moses was more than a leader; he was also a thaumaturge and a cultural benefactor. In Artapanus’ On the Jews, Moses is repeatedly compared and connected with other gods, such as Orpheus, Hermes, and Isis. He is considered to be the teacher of Orpheus (“As a grown man he was called Mousaeus by the Greeks. This Mousaeus was the teacher of Orpheus”) (Praep. Ev. 9.27.3–4), a connection not particular to Artapanus, though certainly not suggested in the LXX. He is further compared to Hermes (equivalent to the Egyptian god Thoth) and considered “worthy of godlike honour” by the priests of Egypt when he invents the Egyptian religion (9.27.6). Also, Moses is placed in contrast to the Egyptian deity Isis. Here is one description of this relationship:

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43 For a complete discussion of the awareness of Moses outside of Judaism see Gager, Moses. For a critical view on the construction of Moses see Jan Assmann, Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997). He makes a case for a “Mosaic Distinction,” which looks broadly at the relationship between ‘true’ and ‘false’ religions. More specifically, it looks at the construction of Egypt as an ultimate ‘other’ from antiquity to the present, and how such ideas have shaped how we think about history, religion, and cultural knowledge.

44 For the development of the conceptualization of Moses see Hindy Najman, Seconding Sinai: the Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism (Leiden: Brill, 2003). For his role as a prophet see Deut 34:10.

45 Holladay, Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors. Volume I., 192, 232–33 n. 46.

46 Holladay, Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors. Volume I., 231 n. 44–45.

47 Praep. Ev. 9.27.6 “On account of these things then Moses was loved by the masses, and was deemed worthy of godlike honour by the priests and called Hermes, on account of the interpretation of sacred letters.”
πάλιν τε τὸν Μώϋσην βάτραχον διὰ τῆς ράβδου ἀνέιναι, πρὸς δὲ τούτοις ἀχρίδας καὶ σκνίφας. διὰ τούτο δὲ καὶ τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους τὴν ράβδον ἀνατιθέναι εἰς πᾶν ἱερόν, ὡμοίως δὲ καὶ τῇ Ἰσιδι, διὰ τὸ τὴν γῆν εἶναι Ἰσιν, παιομένην δὲ τῇ ράβδῳ τὰ τέρατα ἀνεῖναι.

Again Moses released a frog, through his rod, and in addition to these things, locusts and lice. On this account the Egyptians dedicate the rod in every temple, and similarly (they dedicate it) to Isis, since the earth is Isis, and when it was struck with the rod, it released the marvels. (Praep. Ev. 9.27.32) 

The imagery here is poignant. Moses holds the powerful rod and strikes the earth. Moses not only stands upon the earth (Isis), but strikes her and is honoured for this in Egyptian temples (the dedication of the rod). Other references to Moses and Isis have similar connotations of power.

The connection between Moses and other deities raises the question of his humanity. While Moses is not explicitly called a divine figure, his elevation raises some questions about his actual status. In some cases, Moses seems to act alone (9.27.4–6, 22–25, 27–34). Yet, he also acts in response to a higher power. In 9.27.21 Moses is afraid but a “divine voice” (Φωνὴν...θείαν) tells him what to do. Moreover, when crossing the Red Sea, Moses is instructed by a “divine voice” (φωνήν θείαν) to strike the water (9.27.36), which he does, and causes the sea to part and subsequently saves his people. In these examples Moses responds to a higher power, a divine voice, though this is not ubiquitous throughout the account.

As part of his leadership role, Moses leads the people on a ten-year campaign to Ethiopia (9.27.7–10). Chenephres, the Pharaoh, in an effort to get rid of Moses, sends him on a campaign with an army of farmers. Instead of being destroyed, Moses was successful and even won over the hearts of his enemies (“even though they were his enemies, [the Ethiopians] loved

48 On the veneration of the rod of Moses, Holladay suggests connections to Diod. Sic. 1.12.13 and Plutarch’s Isis and Ostris, 363 D–E.

49 For a more nuanced discussion of the relationship between Moses and Isis see chapter four in this study.

50 Praep. Ev. 9.27.7: “But when Chenephres saw the excellence of Moses he was envious of him and sought to destroy him on some specious pretext. Once indeed when the Ethiopians campaigned against Egypt, Chenephres supposed he had found a convenient opportunity and sent Moses against them as a general with an army. But he put together a host of farmers for him, supposing that he would be easily destroyed by the enemy on account of the weakness of his soldiers.” For another source on the militarized figure of Moses, see Josephus, Ant., 2.10.1–2 (238–53).
Moses so much that they learned the circumcision of the genital organs from him, and not only they, but also the priests” [9.27.10]). Thus, Moses is presented as a military figure. This militarized Moses is not found in the book of Exodus. Rather, this is more characteristic of what we find in the book of Joshua in reference to Joshua and the other Israelites leaders. Moses is rarely, if ever, characterized as a military figure in the Hebrew Bible, yet we do find this view in the writings of Josephus. Nevertheless, this military position fits in with his characterization as a leader (even a kind of army leader) of the people.  

Ezekiel the Tragedian’s Exagoge describes the birth and youth of Moses, his departure from Egypt, the burning bush account, the plagues, and the Sea of Reeds account. Despite the fragmentary nature of the text, we also see some ‘non-biblical’ elements, for example his dream about Mount Sinai. From these fragments, Moses is described as special (birth account), raised well (both his birthparents taught him things and he received a good education in Pharaoh’s court), and as someone who stood up for his countryman. He is not described as a lawgiver, at least not in the surviving portions. He has a vision of Sinai (vv. 68–89), but the vision is of a throne, and not of the Torah. The interpretation of the dream reinforces this point, as his father-in-law states “For you shall cause a mighty throne to rise, and you yourself shall rule and govern men” (v. 86). Moreover, Jethro also interprets the dream to be saying that Moses will be able to see the present, past, and future. This Moses is exemplary. He is a leader and visionary, but not a lawgiver. In contrast to Jubilees, where Moses’ role as lawgiver is emphasized, Ezekiel the Tragedian’s Moses is not connected with the law in the same way that we see in other Jewish texts including the book of Exodus.

The figure of Moses in the Wisdom of Solomon is never explicitly named, like all figures in Wisdom. In the exodus narrative in the text, Moses is certainly referenced, as the “Lord’s Attendant” (10.16) and “holy prophet” (11.1), yet his status is significantly reduced. He is

51 Holladay, Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors. Volume I., 235 n. 56 and 239 n. 81. The association between a cultural hero and leading a campaign against Ethiopia is a well-established trope. See examples in Robertson, OTP, 899.

52 Cheon, The Exodus Story in the Wisdom of Solomon, 32.
more of an “assistant” or “helper” than he is an “authoritarian leader” or even a lawgiver.\(^{53}\) Sophia (Lady Wisdom) ultimately guides him in his actions and gives him the authority to withstand and lead the people.

εἰσῆλθεν εἰς ψυχὴν θεράποντος κυρίου
καὶ ἀντέστη βασιλεύσιν φοβεροῖς ἐν τέρασι καὶ σημείοις.
she entered into the soul of the Lord’s attendant
and withstood terrible kings with wonders and signs. (Wis 10.16)

Εὐόδωσεν τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν ἐν χειρὶ προφήτου ἁγίου.
She prospered their actions by the hand of a holy prophet. (Wis 11.1)\(^{54}\)

As such, responsibility does not lie with Moses, but with Wisdom personified as Sophia.\(^{55}\) It is Sophia and not Moses who is the primary leader of the people (Wis 10.17–19). The events at Sinai and his role as a lawgiver are not present in this text as the pursuit of wisdom is the primary goal of its instruction. Thus, in Wisdom, Moses is not a lawgiver but appears in a particular period of time and acts as a holy prophet to assist Sophia in leading the Israelites.

In Life of Moses, Philo elevates Moses to the role of a sage. This is perhaps most clearly seen in his final hours whereby he becomes mind alone (Mos., 2.291). Philo’s descriptions of Moses are modeled on the Greek sage, and he is thus reminiscent of Socrates and other


\(^{54}\) Translations of the Wisdom of Solomon, unless otherwise noted, are taken from NETS.

exemplary Greek figures. Even though the law and Sinai played a significant role in Life of Moses, for Philo the characterization of Moses as a sage is most prominent. As a sage, he is wise and god-like. This is seen clearly in the description of the end of his life:

For when he was already being exhalted and stood at the very barrier, ready at the signal to direct his upward flight to heaven, the divine spirit fell upon him and he prophesied with discernment while still alive the story of his own death; told ere the end how the end came; told how he was buried with none present; surely by no mortal hands but by immortal powers; how also he was not laid to rest in the tomb of his forefathers but was given a monument of special dignity which no man has ever seen; how all the nation wept and mourned for him a whole month and made open display, private and public, of their sorrow, in memory of his vast benevolence and watchful care for each one of them and for all. (Mos., 2.291)

Philo’s conclusions on Moses’ life very clearly outline Moses’ importance. Philo explains: (Mos., 2.292) “Such, as recorded in the Holy Scriptures, was the life and such the end of Moses, king, lawgiver, high priest, prophet.” The figure of Moses for Philo was therefore an all-encompassing exemplary figure. At the same time a king, lawgiver, high priest, and prophet. Thus, Philo’s Moses is different from the other texts insofar as he is called a lawgiver. Yet, Moses is much more than just a lawgiver. According to Mireille Hadas-Lebel, Moses is cast by Philo as an ideal leader. From his birth on, he is placed in the role of a king by way of his being

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56 David T. Runia explains in a section on Philo’s aims that Philo views Moses as the ultimate sage. (Exegesis and Philosophy: Studies on Philo of Alexandria [Norfolk: Variorum, 1990], II. 189–90).

57 For Philo, the idea that Moses is the source of all wisdom is an article of faith. Philo combines the roles of king, priest, lawgiver, and prophet together without any problems. See the argument made by Runia in Exegesis and Philosophy, 7.

58 Hadas-Lebel, Philo, 142–44.
the seventh generation. Moreover, he is an ideal statesman, “devoted to the common good.”

His death scene, as given above, confirms Moses’ uniqueness and his venerable nature.

In the books of Deuteronomy, Philo’s *Life of Moses, Jubilees*, Moses is a lawgiver. While he is also an exemplary leader, the focus is his role at Sinai. The writings from Egypt, with the exception of Philo’s *Life of Moses*, seem more concerned with his role as a leader than as a lawgiver. As a leader, he brings his people to military victory, asserts dominance over Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and guides the people through the Sea of Reeds. Moreover, in the texts from Egypt, the character of Moses is also deeply influenced by Greco-Roman and Egyptian conceptions. In Artapanus, for example, Moses is repeatedly referenced in relation to other deities, and in Philo he is raised in the court, where he receives an exemplary Greek education. Thus, the figure of Moses is steeped in the Egyptian, Greek, and Roman social and cultural traditions prominent in the Ptolemaic and Roman period. Despite the different characterization of Moses in these Jewish-Egyptian texts, it is clear that Moses remains an important figure and foundational model for the Jews of Egypt.

### 2.3.3 Environmental Details

A final feature that is characteristic of these exodus narratives composed in Egypt is the level of detail provided about the physical environment. While several of the examples explored in this section examined more thoroughly in subsequent chapters, an overview of some specific cases will be illustrative. In the book of Exodus, the fluvial environment is described with limited

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60 Hadas-Lebel, *Philo*, 125.

61 Sylvie Honigman suggests that the LXX left a significant stamp on the Jews of Egypt, even more so than the Jews of Judea. Through an investigation of the onomastic evidence, she points out that the “most popular names among Egyptian Jews were not those of the heroes of Judaea, the Maccabees, but those of local characters, like the Biblical Joseph” (124). She claims as a result that Jews of Egypt shifted their identity from the temple in Jerusalem to an internal identity marker, which she says could perhaps be connected to the rise of synagogues and Torah reading. See her discussion in “The Birth of a Diaspora: The Emergence of a Jewish Self-Definition in Ptolemaic Egypt in the Light of Onomastics,” in *Diasporas in Antiquity* (ed. Shaye J. D. Cohen and Ernest S. Frerichs; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 93–127, especially 124–25.
details. The Nile River is mentioned in the context of Moses’ birth and during the account of the plagues, the Sea of Reeds appears in the escape from Egypt, other bodies of water are mentioned in the first plague involving the transformation of water into blood, and hail included in one of the plagues. Yet, besides these references, descriptions of these bodies of water or fluvial phenomena receive little to no attention. The writings from Egypt, in contrast, offer more robust explanations. In addition to new descriptive adjectives, they often describe in detail the weather or fluvial phenomena.

The first example is Artapanus’ explanation of the first plague, the transformation of water into blood. In this passage, there is a conflation between the first plague and the annual inundation:

28. Proceeding a little he struck the Nile with the rod. The river became flooded and deluged all Egypt. From that time also its “inundation” takes place. The water became stagnant and stank and destroyed the creatures that live in rivers and the people perished from thirst. 29. After these marvels the king said he would release the people after a month, if he would restore the river. Moses again struck the water with his rod and drew in the stream. (Praep. Ev. 9.27.28–29)

According to Artapanus the first plague happens at the same time as the initiation of the Nile flood by Moses. Not only does the water become stinky and destructive to life, it becomes that way through a flood. Whereas floods in Egypt are generally seen in a positive light, since this was the primary means through which the land was watered, this flood is destructive to the Egyptians.62 Nowhere in the book of Exodus is the flooding of the Nile referenced. Yet it does

appear in prophetic texts in the Hebrew Bible (Micah 8:8; 9:5; Isa 63) and in the Sibylline Oracles, but there is no other mention in any other Jewish text of the conflation of the flood with the first plague.

In the Exagoge, the marshlands are described. In the LXX, they appear infrequently and are not described with any details. In the LXX the term ἕλος appears four times in the book of Exodus (2:3, 2:5, 7:19, 8:1). In the Exagoge, we learn that Moses is placed as a child “by the bank of the river in the thick and overgrown marsh” (παρ᾽ ἁκρα ποταμου λάσιον εἰς ἕλος δασύ), that the marshes are thick (v. 17: ἕλος δασύ), soggy along the shore (v. 31: ύγρας ποτάμιας), by the river’s edge, and that they provide access to the river, which is used as a place to bathe (vv. 16–20, 30–31). Howard Jacobson suggests that the shift in terminology from ἕλος in the LXX to λάσιον εἰς ἕλος δασύ shifts the emphasis from Moses’ placement on the river (certainly a dangerous predicament) to the relatively safe and protected area of the marshes. Moses is thus not placed in the water but by the water. This interpretive move is in line with what we know about the environment of Egypt, specifically the Delta, which is known for its thick marshes. The river was known to be a dangerous place, not only because of the animals living within it but also for its unpredictable currents and the floodwaters. As a result, Ezekiel clarifies disastrous flood as negative, disasters were always commemorated in a positive way. Even catastrophic floods were presented as a sign of good relations between the gods and the king (196). The one to blame for seasonal plagues (in the period prior to the flood) and the bad quality of water was the figure of Typhon/Seth (200).

In MT, there are two different words used in these cases, suf (Exod 3:2, 3:5; translated as reeds), anam (Exod 7:19, 8:1; translated as pool). The term suf also appears in Exod 10:19, 13:18, 15:4, and 23:31, in reference to the Sea of Reeds.

For similar phraseology see Philo, Mos., 1.10 “παρὰ τὰς ὡχθας τοῦ ποταμοῦ.” The textual similarities between the Exagoge and Philo’s Life of Moses have been identified by Lanfranchi, L’Exagoge, 297–98.

According to Jacobson, a literal reading of this would be “on the bank of the river in a deep bushy marsh.” He bases his reading on Eusebius for his use of δασύ. Clement, in contrast used the term for “deep” instead. Jacobson, The Exagoge, 75–76. Cf. a similar construction in Mos., 1.14 “ἐν τῷ δασυτάτῳ τῶν ἕλων.”

Additionally the text of Livy mentions the placement of Romulus and Remus on the edge of the Tiber river. The infants were brought to the “nearest point of overflow” in a floating basket. When the river waters receeded, the basket was left “high and dry,” saving the lives of the babies. Livy, I 4.
Moses’ situation, he was not floating on the river but was placed in a protected area by the river’s edge.

The *Wisdom of Solomon* discusses the environment in binary terms, contrasting the ‘normal’ environment with that during the time of the plagues. There are two main claims. First, that the divine is in control of the environment and can make it act contrary to its nature. Second, that the environment can simultaneously punish the Egyptians and bless the Israelites. An example of the divine transformation of the environment can be seen in chapter 19. In this chapter we see that water and fire lose their properties and everything is turned on its head during the plague. Similarly, the power of nature and its ability to both punish and bless is emphasized in the book of *Wisdom* (cf. 16.17–19). The role of the divine in altering weather patterns and the fluvial environment is more specific here to the land of Egypt than we find in the book of Exodus or other non-Egyptian narratives of the exodus. For the author of the book of *Wisdom*, it is very clear who is in control and what this power can do to the natural world of Egypt.

Finally, Philo gives many descriptions of the environment of Egypt, often as asides to other discussions. These asides give us a picture of how the environment was viewed in Philo’s day. In *Mos.*, 1.6 he explains the weather and the flood cycle of the Nile. These details are unparalleled in other contemporary Jewish texts, as he readily explains the irrigation of the Nile and the abundance that it produces every year.

One of Philo’s most fascinating descriptions of the environment appears in his account of the first plague. He likens the digging for fresh water on the part of the Egyptians to the hemorrhaging of the body. Such vivid descriptions are contrasted with the clear, pristine, and vivifying waters available to the Hebrews during the plagues.
What, then, was the event which so soon came to pass? The brother of Moses, at the command of God, smote the river with his staff, and at once, from Ethiopia to the sea, it turned to blood, and so did also the lakes, canals, springs, wells and fountains and all the existing water-supply of Egypt. Consequently, having nothing to drink, they dug up the ground along the banks; but the veins thus opened sprouted up spirts of blood, which shot up as in haemorrhages, and not a drop of clear liquid was anywhere to be seen. (Mos., 1.99)

In this passage, we are introduced to new fluvial language and imagery about the plague. We have a series of bodies of water, a different list from what we find in the book of Exodus, demonstrating how Philo’s awareness of his country may have informed his writing perhaps more than his reading of the LXX. Moreover, the likening of the tainted water to a body in a haemorrhage offers a vivid portrayal of the event, also not found in the LXX.

The language used to describe the environment of Egypt is different in the exodus narratives composed in Egypt, primarily in terms of its level of detail. Each text takes a different approach to its narrative, yet they all consistently describe the land of Egypt more thoroughly than other compositions written outside of Egypt, the only exception being Josephus’ writings. Rather than the bare bones versions of Pseudo-Philo and Jubilees, these accounts portray a level of depth that shows how the authors’ experience of Egypt’s environmental realities informed such rewritings of the narrative.

2.4 Conclusion

Although the exodus accounts composed in Egypt each interpret the exodus story in different ways, they share three characteristics that connect them closely to local, environmental realities: (1) the focus on life in Egypt, (2) the figure of Moses as a leader, and (3) the details about their physical environment. These features demonstrate that Egypt was not only an important part of their stories, but also a fundamental, embodied component of their identity. In other words, these authors’ interest in writing about the exodus was likely amplified by their Egyptian setting and—

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68 See chapter five in this study for a more detailed analysis of the terminology used in this passage.
if not Egyptian *per se* at least Alexandrian—identity. By recasting the story, they could give the Jews of Egypt a place in the land. It was not about them living in a land that was not their own; rather, it was living in their home. It may not have been the promised land, but it was an important and formative place nonetheless.

Situating a text within a particular place and examining its role in shaping the development of a foundational Jewish narrative offers a different angle for approaching Egyptian Judaism in the Second Temple period. While connections with the place of Judea or Jerusalem are often emphasized in the study of Second Temple Judaism, this chapter has shown that the place of Egypt had an influence on the narratives of the exodus composed in that place. The following chapter will build on these shared features and claim that not only did these stories contain the same elements, but that the Jewish authors actively adopted aspects of the physical environment of Egypt as their own while at the same time distancing themselves from their Egyptian neighbours.
Chapter 3

3 Shifting Perceptions of the Land of Egypt: *Topophilia* and the Jews of Egypt

3.1 Introduction

According to the Torah, Egypt is not the land of the Israelites. This is perhaps most clearly seen in Gen 15:13, where God says to Abraham that his future offspring will live in a land that is “not theirs,” foreshadowing the events of the exodus. In descriptions of this other place, the Nile river figures prominently, often standing in for the land of Egypt, the Pharaoh, or the Egyptian people more broadly. Whereas references to the Nile in early Jewish literature betray a familiarity with its rise and fall (flood cycle), its role in agricultural production, and its drinkability, the majority of verses cast the Nile negatively (or at best in a neutral way), in line with their descriptions of the Egyptians.

Despite the negative references found in many early Jewish texts, a different view of the Nile emerges in writings composed in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt. The writings of Artapanus, the *Wisdom of Solomon*, and Philo each adopt a more positive perspective towards the river, while maintaining a negative portrayal of the Egyptian people. This chapter will explore the emergence of a distinction between the physical environment and the Egyptian people. I argue that the distinction is grounded in the Jews’ physical experiences with the Nile river. This study suggests that for the Jews of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt the Nile became a significant part of

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1 For a discussion on the Egyptian people as the ultimate other in the writings of Philo see Niehoff, *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture*, in particular chapter 2 “The Egyptian as Ultimate Other,” 45–74. See also F. V. Greifenhagen who writes about Egypt as a topos in the Pentateuch (*Egypt on the Pentateuch’s Ideological Map: Constructing Biblical Israel’s Identity* [New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002]).


3 According to Greifenhagen, the “negative depiction of Egypt in the Pentateuch is overwhelming.” (*Egypt on the Pentateuch’s Ideological Map*, 261).
Jewish life. Moreover, rather than constantly longing for return to their fatherland, the Jews of Egypt enjoyed their Diasporic lives and adapted to their new material context.4

This chapter uses the concept of topophilia—that takes seriously the relationship between people and place—to suggest that the personal and collective experiences with the physical environment had a profound impact on Jewish-Egyptian writings. Through these experiences, the Jews of Egypt came to adopt the environment as their own, incorporating it into the formative narrative of the exodus. Following an introductory section on topophilia, I move into an investigation of the descriptions of the Nile in early Jewish literature composed outside of Egypt. Focusing on the Hebrew Bible and other non-canonical writings, I examine descriptions of the Nile and the meanings associated within them. The final section looks at how the Nile appears in three Jewish exodus narratives, Artapanus’ On the Jews, Philo’s Life of Moses, and the Wisdom of Solomon chapters 10 and 19. Each account incorporates the Nile into their exodus narrative, but in different ways. What they all share, however, is the emphasis on a positive view towards the river, while maintaining a negative view of the Egyptians.

3.2 The Adoption of the Nile: Topophilia and the Jews of Egypt

According to Tim Cresswell, place is not simply something that we understand, read about, or research; rather, it is a part of the way we understand, read, and research.5 Place, in other words, is something that is experienced. Prior to the 1970s, scholars of geography tended to think about place in terms of a location or a region. A new subfield of geography, Human Geography, developed in the 1970s in an attempt to bring humans into the discussion of place. Scholars such as Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph developed more experiential understanding of place influenced by phenomenology.6 What these studies illuminate is how places can be adopted as one’s own. Thus, places transform from an ‘other’ to a kind of home. There are two concepts that can help

4 Gruen. Diaspora.
5 Cresswell, Place (2004), 15.
6 Cresswell, Place (2004); idem, Place (2015); Tuan, Topophilia; idem, Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977).
us to think about how the Nile helped to shape the Jews of Egypt: (1) the connection of people to place, (2) the understanding of place as experienced or lived. If we consider the land of Egypt and the Nile as Jewish places, we can explore the role that the environment played in the formation of an Egyptian Jewish identity in the diaspora.

In his seminal work on the study of human geography, Yi-Fu Tuan coined the term “topophilia” to explain the connection between a people and a place. Simply put, topophilia means love of place. In his book, Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values, he explored how culture and experiences shape how we perceive the environment and also how in turn the environment shapes culture and experiences. One of his main contributions to the field of Geography is his understanding of place as more than a location or a region, but rather place as a product of pause and a chance for attachment. As a product of pause, place is a moment in time and as such place is constantly changing and developing. The chance of attachment is how we connect with place. Both features of his understanding of place offer insights to the study of the Jews of Egypt.

The Egyptian Jewish exodus texts were written in particular periods of time and locations. As such, they offer windows into specific places in time. Egypt was not the exact same place in Artapanus’ time as it was in that of Philo. Rather than give an overall picture of all Jews in Egypt, these texts give a snapshot into a period of time and space. This snapshot is what Tuan means when he explains that place is a product of pause. When we stop to think about a place, it is an unchangeing moment that we see. An example could be a place that one visited as a child, and despite the changes that have occurred over time, such as the development of new buildings, the place remains paused in the memory of that first encounter of the place on the part of the individual.

In addition to place as a moment in time and a product of pause, place is also something with which we form attachments. Tuan explains that familiarity often breeds affection. An example of this might be moving to a new city. While at first it is strange and new, it soon becomes familiar and can become a place that is loved. I argue that the Jews of Egypt came to

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7 “Topophilia is the affective bond between people and place” (Tuan, Topophilia. 4).
8 Tuan, Topophilia, 99.
enjoy living in Egypt and thought of it with fondness. Just as a childhood home or one’s
favourite slippers might evoke feelings of warmth and familiarity, Jewish communities formed
attachments to the land of Egypt. These attachments would have formed through experiences
within a place, an awareness of the past can also shape one’s love of a place. Tuan explains this
in terms of patriotic rhetoric that stresses one’s roots. The fact that we have multiple versions of
the exodus narrative composed in Egypt may be symptomatic of their affection towards Egypt, a
desire on their part to either justify this love or address any questions about their rightful place in
Egypt.

Other scholars writing about place have emphasized the experiential aspect of place,
which seems to stand in contrast to Tuan’s understanding of place as a moment in time and a
product of pause. The work of Edward Relphs in particular focused on experiences built on the
writings of Heidegger and argued that “place determines our experience.” Tim Cresswell explains that for Relphs the “essence of place lies in the largely unselfconscious intentionality
that defines places as refund centres of human existence.” As an experience, it is constantly
changing over time. Allan Pred has argued similarly that place is not fixed in time but is always
‘becoming.’ Also, Nigel Thrift claims that place should be seen as an “embodied relationship
with the world.” These views, when applied to the study of the Jews of Egypt, focus on their
experiences with the physical environment of Egypt. From the mundane to ritual practices, water
was a part of everyone’s lives. The Nile, as the primary source of fresh water in Egypt, was
experienced by all inhabitants in Egypt, whether directly or indirectly. Such experiences with the
Nile would have given them firsthand knowledge of the physical environment. Thinking about

9 Tuan, Topophilia, 99.
10 Tuan, Topophilia, 99.
12 Cresswell, Place (2004), 23.
13 E. Relphs, Place and Placelessness (London: Pion Limited, 1976), 43; See also Cresswell, Place, 23.
14 Cresswell, Place, (2004) 35. Allan Pred discusses ‘becoming’ places in “Place as Historically Contingent
place as both something that shows the relationship between people and place (*Topophilia*), and as something that is directly experienced, offers a different way to think about the importance of Egypt for the Jews. It also helps to explain the variations that developed in the exodus narrative. They were not only written in different interpretive contexts but in different physical ones as well. By focusing on the Nile we can explore how experiences with the Nile as a place could have played a role in shaping the exodus narratives of Egypt.

3.3 The Nile in Early Jewish Literature

The Nile appears frequently in Early Jewish literature.\(^{16}\) From determining boundary lines to descriptions of Egypt’s future destruction, Egypt’s Nile is often cast as the other, contrasted with the righteous Israelites. Whereas many of these accounts describe the Nile negatively, as a stand in for the Egyptian people, this section will provide a more nuanced picture of Jewish views on the river and its people. Through a close reading of a variety of texts, both canonical and non-canonical, I will explore the relationship to the land of Egypt and the Nile specifically.

Descriptions of the Nile in the Hebrew Bible have recently been explored in a study by Diana Edelman titled *The Nile in Biblical Memory*,\(^{17}\) in which she examines the ways in which the Nile appears in different biblical contexts. While Edelman provides a helpful overview of the biblical texts, she does not discuss the non-canonical literature nor the Septuagint. My review will thus pay particular attention to the memories of Egypt that references would have invoked in the Hellenistic and Roman period. By addressing a later corpus of texts, I will be able to see how the Nile was invoked in a number of different ways and for various rhetorical purposes.

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\(^{16}\) It is important to note that in the Hebrew Bible, the Nile goes by many different names (see chapter four in this study for a more robust explanation and also Edelman, “The Nile in Biblical Memory,” 70–72). Unlike the English title “Nile,” derived from the Greek Neiros, there were five different terms used to refer to the Nile, or parts of the Nile. For the purposes of inclusivity, I have included all five of these terms in my analysis.

3.3.1 On the Banks of the Nile

In the books of Genesis and Exodus, important events happen along the banks of the Egyptian river. In Genesis 41, Pharaoh dreams about cows emerging from the river onto the river’s edge:

1. Εγένετο δὲ μετὰ δύο ἐτη ἡμερῶν Φαραώ εἶδεν ἐνύπνιον. ἔτει ἑστάναι ἐπὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ, 2. καὶ ἰδοὺ ὡσπερ ἐκ τοῦ ποταμοῦ ἀνέβαινον ἑπτὰ βόες καλαὶ τῷ εἴδει καὶ ἐκλεκταὶ ταῖς σαρξίν καὶ ἐβόσκοντο ἐν τῷ ἄχει. 3. ἄλλαι δὲ ἑπτὰ βόες ἀνέβαινον μετὰ ταύτας ἐκ τοῦ ποταμοῦ αἰσχραὶ τῷ εἴδει καὶ λεπταὶ ταῖς σαρξίν καὶ ἐνέμοντο παρὰ τὰς βόας παρὰ τὸ χεῖλος τοῦ ποταμοῦ.

1. Now it came about after two years of days that Pharaoh saw a dream. He imagined he was standing by the river, 2. and look, coming up as it were out of the river were seven cows, fair in form and choice in flesh, and they were grazing in the reed grass. 3. And seven other cows, ugly in form and scrawny in flesh, were coming up out of the river after them and were feeding by the cows by the bank of the river. (Gen 41:1–3)

In the Hebrew account the term for the bank of the Nile is הפד meaning lip or edge. The LXX translates the term as χεῖλος, a lip or shore. This dream forecasted what would take place in the future, interpreted by Joseph as seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. The inclusion of the Nile in this vision reveals an awareness of the centrality of the Nile to the agricultural production of Egypt, even in this early text.

The banks of the river also appear in Exodus 2, where Moses is placed in the marshes beside the river by his sister (Exod 2:3) and is subsequently found by Pharaoh’s daughter among the reeds (Exod 2:5). The same word for the bank of the river in Hebrew appears here as it did in Genesis 41 הפד. In this case, Moses was placed among the reeds (סף) that were on the הפד of the river. The LXX simplifies the verse and explains that the basket was placed in the marshes (τὸ ἑλος) by the river (παρὰ τὸν ποταμόν), eliminating the reference to banks. The reference to the side of the river forshadows the future meetings between Pharaoh and Moses that will take place later in the narrative. For example, in Exodus 7:15 they meet on the הפד / χεῖλος, where the first plague is initiated.

In these examples, the river’s edge is established as a place where significant events occur. This description fits in well with our knowledge of the Nilotic environment of the Delta,
which was characterized mainly by extensive marshlands. The exodus narratives composed in Egypt invoke more robust descriptions of these regions, as I explored in chapter two of this study, nevertheless these examples show the understanding of the river as an important location in Egypt.

3.3.2 The Inundation of the Nile

Several prophetic texts contain references to the flooding of the Nile. Amos 8:8 asks rhetorically, “And due to this shall not the land be troubled and everyone mourn who lives in it and consummation rise up like a river and sink like the river of Egypt?” Similarly the prophet Jeremiah asks:

7. τίς οὗτος ὡς ποταμὸς ἀναβήσεται καὶ ὡς ποταμὸι κυμαίνουσιν ὕδωρ;  
8. ὤδατα Αἰγύπτου ὡσεὶ ποταμὸς ἀναβήσεται καὶ εἴπεν Ἀναβήσομαι καὶ κατακαλύψω γῆν καὶ ἀπολῶ κατοικοῦντας ἐν αὐτῇ.

7. Who is this that will rise up like a river, and like rivers surge with water?  
8. Waters of Egypt will rise up like a river, and it said, I will rise up and cover land and destroy inhabitants in it. (LXX Jer 26:7–8; MT Jer 46:7–8)

These two references to the flooding of the Nile in Amos and Jeremiah detail the flood cycle. Both paint a negative picture of the flood, one whose waters surge to destroy towns and their inhabitants. The negative description could stem from the knowledge that sometimes particularly high floods destroyed cities in Egypt. Otherwise, it is possible that this idea about a destructive flood may be drawn from riverine knowledge from the region of Palestine, where rivers flooded

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18 For a description of the physical landscape of the Delta see p. 48 in this study.
19 The term here in Hebrew is ye’or Mitzrāim.
erratically and were far less predictable than the Nile. Nevertheless, the flooding of the Nile here is incorporated into passages about Egypt’s future destruction. These texts frame the Nile flood not as the beneficent giver of life, as presented in Egyptian literature, but as a destroyer of the Egyptian people.

In contrast to the negative associations with flooding, a positive view of the flooding of the Nile as abundant appears in the book of Ben Sira. In chapter 24, the Nile is likened to divine instruction, “It floods like the Nile, with knowledge; like Gihon at vintage time” (Sir 24.27). Gihon in this passage is understood by most scholars to be a reference to the Nile. Here there is a clear connection made between education and the agricultural productivity deriving from the Nile. In other verses in the book of Ben Sira, the notion of overflowing rivers is used to refer to God’s blessings and King Solomon’s wisdom:

His blessing has covered over like the Nile,
and like a flood it has drenched dry land. (Sir 39.22)

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21 Edelman, “The Nile in Biblical Memory,” 71: “These would have been logical assumptions about any perennial river. Since there is nothing in these descriptions of the Nile that would distinguish it from other perennial rivers, like the Tigris and Euphrates, the writers’ knowledge of this land may or may not have been first-hand.”

22 For discussions on the life giving nature of the Nile see Said, The River Nile; Bickel, “Creative and Destructive Waters,” 191–200; Bonneau, Crue.

23 There are many textual issues when looking at the book of Ben Sira. Multiple manuscript traditions are attested in different languages which each preserve different sections and sometimes conflicting terminology. Pancratius C. Beentjes has highlighted the issues with determining the original Hebrew text (The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew [Atlanta: SBL, 2006], 1–10). Even though the text was originally written in Hebrew, oftentimes the Greek or Syriac manuscripts preserve an older text than the Hebrew manuscripts, many of which are late antique or medieval copies. See also the introduction to Sirach in NETS by Benjamin G. Wright (“Sirach: To the Reader,” in A New English Translation of the Septuagint [ed. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007], 715–19).

24 This verse is not attested in our earliest Hebrew manuscripts. There is a discrepancy between the Syriac and Greek manuscripts regarding the word “Nile.” Skehan and DiLella argue that the Syriac represents the correct term (the Nile) whereas the Greek is based on a false reading of the Hebrew (where light was used instead) (Skehan and DiLella, The Wisdom of Ben Sira, 330). The name Gihon is equated with the Nile in LXX Jer 2:18.

25 Gihon is mentioned several times in the Hebrew Bible. Notably it is one of the four rivers of paradise (Gen 2:13). It has three different meanings in the Hebrew Bible: one of the rivers of eden, and the name of place (1 Kgs 1:33, 38, 45; 2 Chron 33:14), and in 2 Chron 32:20 there is a reference to the “waters of Gihon.” It is also the name of a spring near Jerusalem. The mention of Gihon in Ben Sira is drawing on its edenic context.

26 Translation based on NETS. This verse is first attested in Hebrew in MS B dated between the tenth to twelfth centuries CE. Hebrew manuscripts. I have replaced their suggestion of “river” with “Nile” based on the view that the
How wise were you in your youth, and you were filled like the Nile with understanding.\(^{27}\) \(\text{Sir 47.14}\)

These positive examples stand in stark contrast to Jeremiah’s flood. Whereas flooding was often viewed negatively in the prophetic texts of the Hebrew Bible, Ben Sira offers an example of how it could also be understood positively as a metaphor for abundance demonstrating how floodwaters could be interpreted in different ways.\(^{28}\)

### 3.3.3 The Importance of the Nile for Sustenance

In the Roman period, Egypt was considered the ‘breadbasket of the world,’ due to its high yield grain production.\(^{29}\) Yet even in earlier periods ideas about the fertility of the soil in Egypt circulated throughout the ancient Near East. Herodotus’ writings in the fifth century BCE, for example, describes Egypt’s Nile as unlike any other river \(\text{Hist.}, 2.19\). It was considered unique because of its backwards flow (south to north) and its predictable seasons, which Herodotus saw as aiding in the agricultural productivity of Egypt. These views on the Nile were well known by the Hellenistic period and continued to be topics discussed by writers in the Roman and Byzantine eras.

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term Nile appears in the Syriac text. The Greek preserves \textit{potamos} (which refers to the Nile if in the context of Egypt) and there are no older Hebrew versions. Skehan and DiLella translate it as “His blessings overflow like the Nile; like the Euphrates it enriches the surface of the earth” (p. 454). Moreover, Moshe Segal agrees that it should be Nile in both 39.22 and 47.14. In his critical commentary on the Hebrew text of Ben Sira he has included the term \(\text{כיאר}\) (like the Nile). M. Segal, \textit{Sefer Hokhmat Ben Sira ha-shalem; kolel kol ha-perakim ha-‘ivriyim she-nitgalu ‘ad ha-yom ve-targum mada‘i meduyak mi-Yevanit ve-Surit shel ha-mekomot ha-haserim be-‘Ivrit} (Yerushalayim: "Darom", 1932), 150 (\textit{Sir} 24.27), 261 (\textit{Sir} 39.22), 326 (\textit{Sir} 47.14).

\(^{27}\) See note above. I have adapted the translation of NETS. This verse is first attested in Hebrew in MS B dated between the tenth to twelfth centuries CE.

\(^{28}\) According to Bickel, Egyptians always viewed Nile positively (Bickel, “Creative and Destructive Waters,” 191–200).

\(^{29}\) Bowman and Rogan, \textit{Agriculture in Egypt}. 116
In the book of Genesis, Egypt is a place of refuge in times of extreme famine. Abraham travels to Egypt to save his family (Gen 12:10–20). Joseph is sold into slavery in Egypt, but eventually contributes to Egypt’s prosperity by imposing food rationing (Gen 41). Jacob’s sons also travel to Egypt to escape famine before moving their entire family to Egypt for about four hundred years (Gen 46). This tradition of taking refuge continues in the New Testament book of Matthew where Mary and Joseph take the infant Jesus to live in Egypt for a time to escape the wrath of Herod (Matt 2:13–23). Yet in all of these examples, Egypt is a temporary stop, not a place for permanent settlement. What seems to have made Egypt an ideal place of refuge, at least for the Patriarchs, is the reliability of the Nile as the central water source for the inhabitants of Egypt.

Several biblical texts emphasize the importance of water to the land of Egypt. The first plague emphasizes the centrality of water, when the river turned to blood and was no longer drinkable (Exod 7:18). It explains that the people dug around the river to look for drinkable water (Exod 7:24). Isaiah 11 explains how God will destroy the Egyptians by drying up the river (11:15). God will make the river desolate, causing the destruction of the land. In Isaiah 19 the destruction of Egypt will take place by the river:

5. καὶ πίονται οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι ὕδωρ τὸ παρὰ θάλασσαν, ὁ δὲ ποταμὸς ἐκλείψει καὶ ἐξηρανθήσεται.
6. καὶ ἐκλείσωσιν οἱ ποταμοί καὶ αἱ διώρυγες τοῦ ποταμοῦ, καὶ ἐξηρανθήσεται πᾶσα συναγωγὴ ὑδάτος καὶ ἐν παντὶ ἐλείς καὶ λάμμου καὶ παπύρου. 7. καὶ τὸ ἀχί τὸ χλωρὸν πᾶν τὸ κύκλω τοῦ ποταμοῦ καὶ πᾶν τὸ σπειρόμενον δίὰ τοῦ ποταμοῦ ἐξηρανθήσεται ἀνεμόφθορον.

5. And the Egyptians will drink the water that is by the sea, but the river will fail and be dried up, 6. and the rivers and the canals of the river will fail, and every gathering of water, even in every marsh of reed and papyrus, will be dried up. 7. And the green marsh grass, all that is around the river and all that is sown by the river, will be dried up, blasted by the wind. ( Isa 19:5–7)

The centrality of the Nile in this account is clear insofar as its destruction leads to the devastation of the land and to the anxiety of those whose livelihoods are tied to the water. It is not only its drinkability that is mentioned here, but its usefulness in agricultural production and employment.
3.3.4 The Geography of the Nile

Early Jewish texts sometimes refer to the riverine system in Egypt, which includes the Nile proper but also refers to other bodies of water such as wadis or canals that are part of Egypt’s hydrological environment.\(^{30}\) While different terms are sometimes used, adding a level of confusion to the texts, references to riverine bodies in Egypt tend to be used as a way to demarcate the land of Egypt from Palestine. In Genesis, God promises Abram that he will give his offspring from “this land to the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates” (Gen 15:18). A similar verse appears in the Genesis Apocryphon at Qumran, as well as twice in the Samaritan Pentateuch, both using the same terminology, *nahar Mizraim*.\(^{31}\) This indicates an early concern for delimiting and determining the precise coordinates of the different lands. Also, it is interesting insofar as it sees the river as the marker of the beginnings of the land of Egypt and not some other boundary line such as a desert or mountain range. The river of Egypt is also used as an indicator of distance in the book of Judith, whereby Nebuchadnezzar is said to have sent messages as far as the river of Egypt (*τοῦ ποταμοῦ Αἰγύπτου*), in order to recruit others to join him in the war (*Jdt* 1:9).\(^{32}\) Not all scholars agree that these references should be interpreted as the Nile—some instead see them as referring to a small canal that can be found on the northeast edge of Egypt. Yet, the interesting feature to note is that the “river of Egypt” seems to be a characteristic defining marker of the boundary that marks the beginning of the land that is not Israel.

A specific reference to the Delta in Egypt can be found in the Genesis Apocryphon (1Q20). In Col XIX lines 11–13, the text mentions seven branches of the Nile river: 1QapGen ar XIX, 10–13: “I heard that there w[as] gr[ai]n in Egypt, and left 11. to [enter] the land of Egypt […] … […] until] I [reached] the river Carmon, one of the 12. branches of the river … […] now we … our land. [And] I [cro]ssed the seven branches of this river which 13. … […] Then

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\(^{30}\) Edelman lists the different cities in Egypt referenced in the Hebrew Bible (“The Nile in Biblical Memory,” 70–71).

\(^{31}\) The Genesis Apocryphon (1QapGen ar XXI: 11) mentions the river of Egypt, *nahar Mizraim*, an expression used only once in the Hebrew Bible (Gen 15:18), and twice in the Samaritan Pentateuch (Gen 10: 10:19 and 15:18).

\(^{32}\) According to Deborah Levine Gera, the reference in Judith is not to the Nile itself but to wadi el-Arish, a body of water that separates Egypt and Palestine (*Judith* [Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014], 126).
we crossed our land and we entered the land of the sons of Ham, the land of Egypt.”

In antiquity multiple branches of the Nile in the Delta existed, although their precise locations differ somewhat in our ancient sources. What this reference to branches demonstrates is the familiarity with the tradition that there were multiple branches of the Nile river in the Delta region.

Another way to study Nilotic imagery and geography is to look at how it appears in relation to other rivers in the biblical texts. In this case the Euphrates serves as an interesting example to explore. Both appear in Gen 2:14 as the rivers of paradise. In later passages, however, the Euphrates it not simply another river, but rather it is the great river. In Gen 15:18, Deut 1:7, and Josh 1:4, the Euphrates not just any river, it is great (יָם). In the book of Revelation this sentiment also appears (e.g. Rev 9:14; 16:12). A different view is found in Ben Sira, whereby the Euphrates flood is compared to the pouring out of understanding (Sir 24.26), a different view entirely from what we find in the books of Genesis, Deuteronomy, and Joshua. What is revealed in this example is the emphasis on the Euphrates over the Nile in the Hebrew Bible. Having been composed prior to the Hellenistic period, those texts that mention the great Euphrates seem to be concerned with othering Egypt, a trend that is found throughout the Hebrew Bible.

This section has examined some of the ways that the Nile is invoked in discussions of Egypt. The picture is not wholly negative, however, there is a tendency to see the Egyptian land in a negative or neutral light. The Nile is consistently the ‘other’ and while the ancient Patriarchs benefitted from their stays there, it was never meant to be their home. It was a place to be sure,

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34 For details on these different branches according to ancient writers see n.173 in this study. Scholars have attempted to connect them to modern waterways. Bowman and Rogan explain, “The Pelusiac is thought to correspond to the eastern branch, the Tanitic with the Bahr Muways, the Mendesian with part of the Bahr al-Sagir, the Phatnitic with the Damietta branch, the Sebennytic with the Bahr Tira, the Bolbitine with the Rosetta branch, and the Canopic with parts of the Bahr Diyab. Two millennia of river activity make any close correspondence highly unlikely.” (Bowman and Rogan, Agriculture in Egypt).

35 Greifenhagen, Egypt on the Pentateuch’s Ideological Map, 5–6: Egypt is more than a geographical place, it also serves as a “multi-valent metaphor or symbol in which the geographic or ethnographic referent is overy determined by the values or ideology of the producers of the document.”
but it was not *their* place. Further, the invocation of the Nile as a boundary marker of the promised land is illustrative of the perspectives of Egypt as a dangerous or at least liminal place.

### 3.4 The Nile in the Exodus Narratives from Egypt

In contrast to depictions of Egypt as a temporary home of the Patriarchs and the dramatic drying up of the Nile in biblical prophetic texts, the exodus narratives composed in Egypt incorporate the Nile in positive ways into their writings. Artapanus’ *On the Jews* asserts Moses’ role in the inundation of the Nile, *Wisdom* explains how water blesses the Israelites while simultaneously punishing the Egyptians, and in *Life of Moses*, Philo inserts descriptions of weather patterns and the flood cycle into his narrative about Moses and the plagues. While often subtle, each narrative departs to various degrees from the book of Exodus’ account in the incorporation of the fluvial landscape in their texts.

### 3.4.1 Artapanus and the Jewish Nile

For Artapanus, the Nile was not the Egyptians’ river, it was the river of the Jews. This can be seen most clearly through a close study of the relationship between Moses and the river. Moses is shown to be: (1) in control of the Nile and (2) as superior to other Egyptian deities associated with the river. These two connections between Moses and the river show how Artapanus saw the Nile not as the Egyptian’s river, but that of the Jews.

#### 3.4.1.1 Moses’ Control of the Nile

Moses’ control over water exemplifies how the Nile is taken and adopted into the exodus narrative. While we see in the book of Exodus, among other texts, that God is in control of the Nile, Artapanus takes it to new extremes. First, we see that Moses exerts control over the natural environment. Second, the Nile is not only transformed during the plagues but we find that Moses initiates the flood itself. In this way, Artapanus claims responsibility for the agricultural wealth of the land of Egypt, which would not have existed without the flood (*Praep. Ev.* 9.27.28). In
this text, Moses’ power is greater here than we see in the book of Exodus, where he is depicted as lacking confidence (Exod 4, 6:12) and consistently following the orders of God (e.g. Exod 7–12 plague accounts). In On the Jews verses 28–29, the flooding of the Nile is attributed to Moses. This claim goes beyond his control over a one time natural phenomena; rather, the passage suggests that Moses is responsible for the existence of Egypt itself. This large claim is in line with earlier grand assertions that Moses invented philosophy and the Egyptian religion (Praep. Ev. 9.27.4–5). While Gruen claims that this text was meant to be humorous and should not be taken at face value, the statements made by Artapanus about the flooding of the Nile places the river squarely into the history of the Jews. For second century BCE Jews living in Egypt, the Nile was not solely the river of the Egyptians; it was their river as well. The ways in which the Jews engaged with water is further evidenced in documentary sources. As discussed in chapter one, notable examples include the placement of Jewish buildings nearby to the river (CIJ II 1440 from Schedia; C.Pap.Jud. I 134 from Arsinoe), the role of the Nile in commercial endeavors (C.Pap.Jud. III 518b for trade along the Nile and C.Pap.Jud. II 1537 attests to trade along the Red Sea), and the large amount of water needed for the Jewish community of Roman Arsinoe (C.Pap.Jud. II 432).

3.4.1.2 Moses and other Nilotic Deities

The ability of Moses to control nature (usually but not always by divine providence) goes hand in hand with assertions about the relative lack of abilities of the Egyptian deities. For the purposes of reflecting on the Nile river, I will specifically examine how Isis is depicted in the excerpts. However, first an exploration of how Isis is viewed in Egyptian belief will provide the background for her depiction in Artapanus.

36 Collins does not agree with Gruen that Artapanus’ writings were not meant to be taken seriously by its audience. See Collins, “Reinventing Exodus.”

37 For examples of how the Jews used the river see chapter 1 in this study.

38 “36. But a divine voice came to Moses to strike the sea with his rod and divide it. When Moses heard, he touched the water with the rod and thus the flowing water separated and the host went through a dry path. 37. He [Artapanus] says that when the Egyptians went in with them and pursued, fire shone out in front of them and the sea again flooded the path. All the Egyptians were destroyed by both the fire and the flood.” (Praep. Ev., 9.27.36–37).
According to Serge Sauneron, Isis probably began as a goddess of the royal throne based on her name meaning “seat.”\(^{39}\) By the Late Period (712–332 BCE) she became very popular with the Egyptian people and was worshipped throughout Egypt.\(^{40}\) Early on she was associated with the god Osiris, who originally developed as an embodiment of the fertility of the earth and plants according to Sauneron, even though in the earliest Egyptian literature he is depicted as a funerary god.\(^{41}\) Both Isis and Osiris were connected to the Nile and specifically its flood well into the Roman period. In the Ptolemaic period, the god Serapis came to replace Osiris in some cults, leading to the new cults of Isis and Serapis throughout Mediterranean. Isis was well known as the one who initiated the flood.\(^{42}\) Despite these many ideas presented of Isis and Osiris, they are all deeply and historically connected to water (especially sacred flood water) through their connections to the annual Nile flood.

The Isis cult appears in the excerpts from Artapanus frequently in comparisons with Moses. The earliest example in the text is not immediately apparent but suggests Moses’ adoptive mother was Isis. In *Praep Ev.* 9.27.3 “The man begot Merris, whom he betrothed to a certain Chenephres who was king over the regions beyond Memphis.” This daughter, Merris (Μέρριν), was barren and adopted Moses to be her child.\(^{43}\) There are a number of connections between Moses and Isis being hinted at in this verse. First it is important to know that there is an

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40. Sauneron, “Isis,” 138: Including the Iseum in the Delta to Coptos and the Island of Philae “where the famous and best preserved of her temples was built”

41. Evidence for this can be found Pyramid Texts from Sakkara from the fifth and sixth dynasties (2494–2181 BCE), Coffin texts during the Middle Kingdom (2055–1650 BCE), as well as in the Book of the Dead, funerary liturgy, and daily Temple rituals (See Griffiths, *Plutarch*, 33–34).

42. There were many different interpretations of her exact role that depended upon which version of the Osirian myth to which one chooses to subscribe. In one version, it was the tears that she shed over the death of Osiris that brought the flood. Another mentions the flapping of her wings, which caused the wind to blow. A third attributes the hair of Isis as being the official announcement of the flood. Other traditions associate her with Sothis, with the constellation of Sirius, and the moon, which corresponded to the time of the year when the flood began overflowing its banks. Bonneau gives a summary of each of the interpretations listed; see *Crue*; her tears initialized the flood (255–58); the flapping of her wings caused the wind to blow (258–59); seeing her hair was the official announcement of the flood (259–63); association with Sothis (263–66); association with Sirius (266–69); and her connections with Io the moon (269–70).

43. The Greek name Μέρριν seems to be a variation of the masculine name Μαρρης according to Trismegistos (http://www.trismegistos.org/nam/detail.php?record=443). This exact variant appears in a papyrus from Egypt, *C.Pap.Jud.* II 416 (P. Cornell 21), from Philadelphia, Egypt in 33 CE.
established tradition whereby Moses’ wet-nurse (Pharaoh’s daughter) is named Thermuthis (θέρµουθις), who was also the partner of Agathos Daimôn, after whom the Caopic branch was renamed by Ptolemy the Geographer under the Principate (Josephus, Ant., 2.224, 232, 236, 243 and Jub 47.5 [Tharmuth]). The name Thermuthis (Renenoutet in Egyptian) appears in Pyramid texts from the Middle Kingdom. By the Hellenistic period, a well-developed cult had developed that understood her to be a goddess of crops (specifically preserving grain). Under the Ptolemies, her characterization blended with that of Isis. She was often depicted with a child and as the embodiment of divine motherhood. While the name Merris does not draw any explicit connection to the Isis cult, her role as Moses’ wet-nurse suggests a connection with the Thermuthis tradition, which was intertwined with the Isis cult by the time of Artapanus’ writing. Furthermore, according to both Diodorus and Strabo (Dio 3.9.2; Strabo, Geogr., 17.2.3), Isis was worshipped at Meroë, which is the same place where Merris is buried (Praep. Ev. 9.27.16): in this place, “Merris was honoured by the local residents no less than Isis.” Again, if we take Merris to represent Thermuthis then we have further evidence of the established tradition of Isis in Egypt and how Artapanus’ is showing his understanding of both the Isis and Thermuthis cults of Hellenistic Egypt.

Isis also appears following a mention of the various plagues that inflicted the Egyptians, the excerpt says: “On this account the Egyptians dedicate the rod in every temple, and similarly (they dedicate it) to Isis, since the earth is Isis, and when it was struck with the rod, it released the marvels” (Praep. Ev. 9.27.32). There are a number of features to point out in this verse. First, the rod of Moses is repeatedly used to strike things in the text. Moses strikes the Nile (v. 28), the earth (v. 32), and the Red Sea (v. 36). Unlike the book of Exodus where Moses usually holds the rod out over the waters or the land, Artapanus uses the rod primarily for striking. In

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44 I am thankful to Katherine Blouin for sharing some notes from her draft of an article: “L’Agathos Daimôn et son culte dans l’Égypte hellénistique et romaine: ce que révèlent les sources onomastiques,” in Études d’onomastique égyptienne (ed. Y. Gourdon and Å. Engshegen; Cairo, IFAO, forthcoming).


47 On the significance of the dedication of the rod see Holladay, Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors. Volume I., 242 n. 109.
verse 32 the ground is said to represent Isis. A similar depiction of Isis as the earth can be found in Plutarch’s *Isis and Osiris* (32 and 38; See also *Diod* 1.12.4). Thus the act of striking the earth in verse 32 is symbolic of Moses’ power over Isis. Lastly, the rod is said to have been dedicated in every temple and also to Isis. While Collins suggests that this verse clearly asserts Moses’ power over Isis, it could also be interpreted as Moses’ rod drawing part of its power from the Isis cult and bolstering support for Moses by aligning him with Isis. In this way, Moses is connected with this powerful deity. The excerpts of Artapanus are not simply about showing the superiority of the Jews over the Egyptians, but they show the ways in which Judaism was profoundly a part of the Egyptian landscape, both geographically and religiously. By drawing connections with Moses and Isis, Artapanus sheds light on the more syncretistic aspects of Jewish life in Egypt. They were not a people completely set apart, but they were deeply part of the fabric of Hellenistic Egypt. This intertwining of the Jews with their cultural neighbors is well attested in documentary evidence. For example, as we saw in chapter one, lists of Jewish names often appear beside Egyptian or Persian names in Ptolemaic Edfu.

A closer look at the Nile and how it is represented in *On the Jews* reveals how Artapanus saw the Nile as a part of the Jewish narrative and the figure of Moses. It is debated whether or not this text was apologetic. I think that it reflects how some Jews perceived their connections to the land, which may have required some kind of explanation for their circumstances. Contrary to the exodus expulsion narrative and the view according to which the Jews of Egypt were a persecuted group, Jews actually thrived in Egypt, migrating there in vast numbers. Therefore, in my view, the writings of Artapanus reflect the negotiation between the prohibition to return and their enjoyment of living in Egypt, as well as their desire to tie themselves historically to the place.

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49 See pages 39–42 in this study. Other examples include the sharing of water resources with non-Jews in Arsinoe (*C.Pap.Jud.* II 432) and the location of a proseuche in Arsinoe beside a Sarapeion and a land likely owned by a Greek (*C.Pap.Jud.* I 139).
50 See pages 87–88 in this study for a discussion on the exodus expulsion narrative in antiquity.
3.4.2 *Wisdom of Solomon* and the Divine Control of Water

As seen above, the *Wisdom of Solomon* (hereafter *Wisdom*) was composed in Alexandria around 50 CE. Most scholars place this book in an Alexandrian setting because of its vitriolic statements about Egyptians and its familiarity with Greek philosophical traditions. In the early first century CE, tensions developed in Alexandria between the Alexandrians and the Jews. Tensions boiled over between 38–41 CE, resulting in many casualties and the development of a cultural rift in the comparatively peaceful life in Alexandria under the Ptolemies. According to Modrzejewski, these tensions were felt long after this crisis and ultimately re-surfaced in the Jewish revolts of 115–117, resulting in the disappearance of Jewish communities. These tensions between the Alexandrians and the Jews appear in the backdrop of the book of *Wisdom* and are important to keep in mind when reading the text.

The events of the exodus appear in the last half of the book. Here the author artfully weaves together key events from the exodus out of Egypt and those from the early wanderings of the Jews in the desert. The author seems to assume familiarity with the LXX as it references events often in subtle ways. Instead of providing a point-by-point chronological retelling, the author of the book of *Wisdom* draws on Greek philosophical ideals and rhetorical devices in order to provide edification and encouragement to his fellow Jews in light of contemporary events through a reinterpretation of the past events from Jewish history.

3.4.2.1 The Egyptians versus the Hebrews

It is difficult to find a text with as much negativity towards the Egyptians as the book of *Wisdom*, especially in the chapters dealing with the exodus account. In chapter 10, the author of *Wisdom* explains how lady wisdom rescued “a holy and blameless race” from a “nation of oppressors” (10:15). In Wis 19.13 the punishment of the Egyptians for their impiety is said to have been a just reward for their wickedness and hatred of others. Additionally, the Egyptians are derided for their animal worship:

15. ἀντὶ δὲ λογισμῶν ἁσυνέτων ἁδικίας αὐτῶν, ἐν οἷς πλανηθέντες ἐθρήσκευον ἁλογικὰ ἐρπετά καὶ κνώδαλα εὐτελῆ, ἐπαπέστειλας πλῆθος ἁλογών ζώων εἰς ἑκδίκησιν,
16. ἵνα γνῶσιν ὅτι, δι᾽ ὃν τις ἁμαρτάνει, διὰ τούτων κολάζεται.

15. In return for their senseless and wicked thoughts through which they were led astray to worship irrational reptiles and worthless vermin, you sent on them a multitude of irrational creatures to take vengeance
16. in order that they might learn that a person is punished by the very things by which the person sins. (Wis 11.15–16).

The author of Wisdom explains that the Egyptians were punished by the very things that they worshipped, while the Israelites were blessed by the same things that punished the Egyptians (Wis 11.5).

In contrast to the negative portrayal of all Egyptians, the Jews are righteous and blameless (10:15). As a result of their behaviour, God protects them and keeps them safe from harm.

Chapter 19 describes the kind of care that he takes for his people. The chapter concludes with an address to God claiming that he magnified and glorified his people and stood by them at all times (“you magnified your people and glorified them and did not disregard them, standing by them in every time and place”) (Wis 19.22). This also sets them apart from their enemies, who are given no such treatment.

3.4.2.2 Simultaneous Blessings and Punishments

The contrast between the Egyptians and the Jews gives the authors space to explain how the punishments affected the Hebrews, a topic not addressed in the book of Exodus, but picked up by Second Temple interpreters. Both Philo and Josephus explain emphatically that the plagues did not touch the Hebrews (Mos., 1.143; Ant., 2.14.1). What is different about Wisdom’s approach to this topic is that it goes further in claiming that the Hebrews are being blessed while the Egyptians are being punished. Wisdom 11.4–5 explains:

53 This is particularly interesting when read beside Artapanus, who claims that Moses invented the Egyptian religion. See Praep. Ev. 9.27.4.
4. They thirsted and called upon you, and water was given them out of flinty rock, and a remedy for their thirst out of hard stone.
5. For through the very things by which their enemies were punished, they themselves were benefited in their need. (Wis 11.4–5)

This is different from the explanations of the plagues in the Hebrew Bible. The book of Exodus explains the plagues as punishment for Pharaoh’s lack of adherence to Moses’ demands. Both use water as a tool for punishment but the reason for the punishment varies. For Exodus, nature is wielded to destroy people and produce throughout Egypt. Yet for Wisdom, it is the sin that causes nature to treat people differently, blessing the Hebrews while simultaneously punishing their enemies. In other words, if one is righteous then nature will be a positive force, but if not then it will be destructive.¹⁵⁴

While the Nile negatively impacts the Egyptians in the Hebrew Bible, in the book of Wisdom, the Nile (and water more broadly) can be both a negative and positive force, depending on which team you are supporting. While subtle, this suggests a desire to explain how behaviour results in different reactions from the divine.

3.4.2.3 The Natural World

Nature and the natural world are transformed in the Wisdom narrative. During the period of the plagues, Wisdom argues, the natural world did not behave according to its nature. For example,

¹⁵⁴ This is similar to how the Egyptians understood the natural environment, insofar as the environment had a direct relationship to how people acted. Bonneau, Crue, 306–13: in the Roman period, the Nile was seen to function as an instrument of justice (310).
Wisdom explains that water did not retain its fire-quenching properties (Wis 19.20). Descriptions of the natural (and unnatural) phenomenon demonstrate the normal expectations of the natural world experienced by the author of Wisdom. Through these descriptions we can learn about how the natural world was understood, and perhaps experienced by the Jews.

One thing that we learn is the binary nature of the elements. Specifically fire and water, which do not act normally during the plagues.\(^{55}\) The transformation shows how the author of Wisdom understood the normal state of the elements. Chapter 19 gives the most insightful explanation of the elements. Beginning with a discussion of harp notes, he explains how nature was turned on its head during the exodus:

\[\Delta\iota\ \varepsilon\alphaυτων\ \gammaαρ\ \tauα\ \sigmaτοιχεια\ \muεθαρμοζομενα,\]
\[\omegaσπερ\ \epsilonν\ \psiαλτηριων\ \φθογγοι\ τοι\ \ρυθμοι\ το\ \ονομα\ \διαλλασσουσιν,\]
\[\piαντοτε\ \muενοντα\ \ηχω,\]
\[\οπερ\ \εστιν\ \εικασαι\ \εκ\ \της\ \των\ \γεγονων\ \ονα\ \διαλλασσουσιν,\]
\[\piαντοτε\ \ενοντα\ \ηχω,\]
\[\οπερ\ \εστιν\ \εικασαι\ \εκ\ \της\ \των\ \γεγονων\ \ονα,\]
\[\eta\chiω,\]
\[\οπερ\ \εστιν\ \εικασαι\ \εκ\ \της\ \των\ \γεγονων\ \ονα\ \διαλλασσουσιν,\]
\[\piαντοτε\ \ενοντα\ \ηχω,\]
\[\οπερ\ \εστιν\ \εικασαι\ \εκ\ \της\ \των\ \γεγονων\ \ονα\ \διαλλασσουσιν,\]
\[\piαντοτε\ \ενοντα\ \ηχω,\]
\[\οπερ\ \εστιν\ \εικασαι\ \εκ\ \της\ \των\ \γεγονων\ \ονα\ \διαλλασσουσιν,\]
\[\piαντοτε\ \ενοντα\ \ηχω,\]
\[\οπερ\ \εστιν\ \εικασαι\ \εκ\ \της\ \των\ \γεγονων\ \ονα\ \διαλλασσουσιν,\]
\[\piαντοτε\ \ενοντα\ \ηχω,\]
\[\οπερ\ \εστιν\ \εικασαι\ \εκ\ \της\ \των\ \γεγονων\ \ονα\ \διαλλασσουσιν,\]
\[\piαντοτε\ \ενοντα\ \ηχω,\]
\[\οπερ\ \εστιν\ \εικασαι\ \εκ\ \της\ \των\ \γεγονων\ \ονα\ \διαλλασσουσιν,\]
\[\piαντοτε\ \ενοντα\ \ηχω,\]
\[\οπερ\ \εστιν\ \εικασαι\ \εκ\ \της\ \των\ \γεγονων\ \ονα\ \διαλλασσουσιν,\]
\[\piαντοτε\ \ενοντα\ \ηχω,\]
\[\οπερ\ \εστιν\ \εικασαι\ \εκ\ \της\ \των\ \γεγονων\ \ονα\ \διαλλασσουσιν,\]
\[\piαντοτε\ \ενοντα\ \ηχω,\]
\[\οπερ\ \εστιν\ \εικασαι\ \εκ\ \της\ \των\ \γεγονων\ \ονα\ \διαλλασσουσιν.\]

For as on a harp the notes vary the nature of the rhythm, while beach note always keeps to its sound, so the elements changed places with one another, as may be accurately inferred from the sight of the things that happened. (Wis 19.18)

The author of Wisdom uses the analogy of music to explain the natural world and its order. The place where creatures move, the role of water in quenching fire, and the role of fire to consume all changed (Wis 19.19–21). The examples encapsulate the plagues involving water, fire, and animals. All are essential to life emphasizing the devastating consequences that their transformation would have caused.

The natural world was a place that could be altered by the divine. The inscription found in El-Kanais that praises God for his protection during his sea voyage is an example of how this idea was more than a literary trope (CIJ II 1537).\(^{56}\) During the plagues, Wisdom explains that

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\(^{56}\) See pages 43 in this study for a translation and explanation of the source.
nature did not behave in its usual way. The ability to control and wield its power shows both the strength of the Jewish god and the despicable nature of the Egyptian people.

*Wisdom* offers a view of the fluvial environment of Egypt that is orderly and tied to human actions. During the plagues this order was disrupted due to the unrighteous acts of the Egyptians, yet the Hebrews benefitted dramatically from the very punishments inflicted upon their enemies. While presenting a divinely controlled fluvial environment, *Wisdom* suggests that there is a structure to it all, unlike what is presented in the book of Exodus. Building on Hellenistic philosophical traditions, the *Wisdom of Solomon* offers a retake of the narrative that serves to elevate the Hebrews and present them as recipients of divine (and therefore environmental) favour.

### 3.4.3 Philo’s Natural Environment of Egypt

The environment of Egypt figures frequently in Philo’s *Life of Moses*, especially in book one. As argued by Niehoff, Philo adopts a similar view of the Egyptians as developed by Herodotus. Both see a deep connection between the Egyptian people and their river. While the writings of Herodotus certainly resonate with Philo, his excurses on the ecology and seasonal details in Egypt does not suggest a wholly negative portrayal of the land of Egypt, rather it is squarely on the Egyptians and their misunderstanding of nature that he despises.

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57 The connection between the Nile and Egyptian people is reminiscent of Herodotus, who saw the nature of the Egyptians as tied to the Nile River. According to Herodotus, the Nile River represented the Egyptian people (Herodotus, *Hist.*, 2.19, 2.35). He believed that the nature of the Egyptian people was a direct result of the nature of their river. According to Niehoff, this was not meant to be a particularly negative or charged characterization but a neutral one. For Herodotus, the Nile was akin to the Egyptians and therefore could be used as giving a glimpse into the nature of the inhabitants. In a sense this is how the early writers and scribes of early Jewish literature, including the Hebrew Bible, understood Egypt and the Egyptians. The Nile River was part of the Egyptian identity. Even though some of these writers likely knew very little about the physical environment of Egypt, they saw this land as entirely different from that of the promised land (Niehoff, *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture*, 50–52).

58 Niehoff argues that Philo sees an extreme attachment of the Egyptians to the soil/land of Egypt. Philo’s allegorical view, she argues, sees Jews and Greeks as transcended from the earth, and the Egyptians as bound by it. In my reading, this does not capture entirely Philo’s view towards the land. Instead, I argue that Philo sees the Egyptians as having an incorrect understanding of nature, whereas the Jews (and the Greeks) had a proper understanding of land. (Niehoff, *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture*, 52).
According to Philo, the plagues were the result of the impiety, or atheism, of the Egyptian people.\textsuperscript{59} This impiety can be seen in the Nilotic worship that the Egyptians engage in. Philo explains that:

καὶ πρῶτας ἐπιφέρειν ἄρχεται τὰς ἀφ᾽ ὕδατος· ἐπειδὴ γὰρ τὸ ὕδωρ Αἰγύπτιοι διαφερόντως ἐκτετιμήκασιν ἄρχὴν τῆς τῶν ὄλων γενέσεως τούτης εἶναι νομίζοντες, αὐτὸ πρῶτον ἥξισεν καλέσαι πρὸς τὴν τῶν ἀποδεχομένων ἐπιπλήξιν τε καὶ νουθεσίαν.

He began by bringing into play first the plagues of water; for, since the Egyptians had paid a specially high homage to water, which they believed to be the original source of the creation of the All, He thought well to summon water first to reprove and admonish its votaries. (\textit{Mos.}, 1.98)\textsuperscript{60}

There are two main points here that Philo is emphasizing. First, he claims that the reason for the first plague being associated with water is the misplaced honour towards the Nile by the Egyptians. Second, the reason for this honour was that they understood water as the first principle of creation. This is in line with the Egyptian cosmological views, whereby the Nun was considered the primordial waters from which everything in the world was formed.\textsuperscript{61}

Ritual ceremonies using water was commonplace in Egypt. Ceremonies in the Roman period depict Serapis carrying a water pitcher on his head symbolizing the importance of the water. Also, many rituals involved the storage of the Nile water\textsuperscript{62} or the practice of throwing items of value into the water, as a kind of ritual sacrifice.\textsuperscript{63} What \textit{Mos.}, 1.98 shows is that Philo

\textsuperscript{59} Pearce, \textit{The Land of the Body}.

\textsuperscript{60} For another translation see Young, \textit{Philo}: “And first of all [God] began to bring on the plagues derived from water; for as the Egyptians used to honour the water in an especial degree, thinking that it was the first principle of the creation of the universe, he thought it fitting to summon that first to the affliction and correction of those who thus honoured it.”

\textsuperscript{61} Bonneau, \textit{Crue}, 63. The Nun was considered the birthplace of everything. In the Egyptian understanding of the flood, the floodwaters came from the Nun, which was seen as surrounding all life (both above and below them).

\textsuperscript{62} Wild, \textit{Water in the Cultic Worship of Isis and Sarapis}.

\textsuperscript{63} \textit{P. Oxy} 1211: “To the strategus, articles for the sacrifice of the most sacred Nile on Pauni 30: 1 calf; 2 jars of sweet wine, 16 wafers, 16 garlands, 16 cones, 16 cakes, 16 green palm branches, 16 reeds likewise, oil, honey, milk, every spice except frankincense.” Translation from Arthur S. Hunt, ed. \textit{The Oxyrhynchus Papyri Part IX} (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1912), 256. One striking thing to note in this passage is the use of the number sixteen which is symbolic of the ideal rise of the flood (sixteen cubits).
believed that the Egyptians incorrectly worshipped the Nile water, suggesting that there was a better way to understand or engage with it (presumably seeing it as a tool that can be used by the divine to punish or bless). In this case, the Nile is not synonymous with the Egyptian people, rather they are seen as distinct and hierarchized entities.

A different way of looking at Philo’s distinction between the environment and the people is to look at how he describes the hailstorms and their results. Here we can compare the before and after of the plague. Here are some selections from his description:

114. Αἶγυπτος γὰρ μόνη σχεδὸν τι παρὰ τὰς ἐν τῷ νοτίῳ κλίματι χώρας τῶν ἐτησίων ὦρῶν μίαν τὴν χειμερινὴν οὐ παραδέχεται, τάχα μὲν, ὡς λόγος, διὰ τὸ μὴ πόρρω ἐνωνὶς διακεκαμψόμενης ἐίναι, πέντε τοῦ πυρόδους ἐκεῖθεν ἀφανῶς καὶ τὰν κύκλῳ πάντα ἀλεάινοντος, τάχα δὲ ἐπεὶ καὶ ταῖς θερινοῖς τροπαίς καὶ ταῖς ἀνακοινώσεις ἐπιβαίνειν τῆς θαλάσσης ὑπὸ ἐκχείσθαι βίας ἀνέτης τῶν ἔτην παρὰ τῶν οἰκῶν ἡμῶν καὶ οὐδὲν τε ἐνπάντως ἔνδοκάρα, τὴς βαλάνσις ὑπὸ βίος τῶν ἀνέμων πρὸς ὕψος αἰρομένης καὶ τὰς τρικυκλίας ὑστερα παράπληκτος ἁπείροντος τοῦ τῶν ἡμῖν ἀπὸ τῶν τετταρακότων ἀνατρέχοντος εὐφύσῃ τε μὴ δυναμένων (ἀλλὰ νομίζω, ὅτι κατάλαβα τοῦτο τοῦ γὰρ παρ’ ἐκάτερα

115. Πλημμυρων δὲ πόταμος προαναλίσκει τὰς νεφώσεις,—ἀρχεται μὲν γὰρ ἐπιβαίνειν εἴρινους ἐνισταμένους, λήγει δὲ λήγοντος, ἐν ὦ χρόνω καὶ οἱ ἐτησίας κατατίθενται ἐξ ἐναντίας τῶν τοῦ Νείλου στοιχείων, δι’ ἕνων ἐντὸς κυλιόμενος ἐκχείσθαι, τῆς βαλάνσις ὑπὸ βίος τῶν ἀνέμων πρὸς ὕψος αἰρομένης καὶ τὰς τρικυκλίας ὑστερα παράπληκτος τοῦ τῶν ἡμῖν ἀπὸ τῶν τετταρακότων ἀνατρέχοντος εὐφύσῃ τε μὴ δυναμένων (ἀλλὰ νομίζω, ὅτι κατάλαβα τοῦτο τοῦ γὰρ παρ’ ἐκάτερα

116. Ἐκβλήσουσιν ὑπὸντα, μεταωριζόμενος ὡς εἰκὸς ἐπιβαίνει—, τάχα δὲ ἐπεὶ καὶ περίττον ἦν ἐν Αἴγυπτῳ χειμώνα γενέσθαι—πρὸς δὲ γὰρ ἀντὶ τῶν ὄμβρων φοραὶ χρήσται, καὶ οὶ ποταμοὶ χμνάζον ταῖς ἀρούρας εἰς 117. καρπῶν ἐτησίων γένεσθαι. ἡ δὲ φύσις ὡς ματαιοργός, ὡς ύπον κυριηγείν μὴ δεομένη γῇ, καὶ ἐπιστημονικῶν ἔργων τὴν συμφωνίαν τῶν παντὸς ἐξ ἐναντιοτῆτος ἐναρμοσμένη· καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τοῖς μὲν ἀνωθεν εἰς οὐρανὸν τὸς δὲ κάτωθεν ἐκ πηγῶν τε καὶ ποταμῶν παρέχει τὴν ἐξ ὕδατος ωφέλειαν.

114. We must remember that Egypt is almost the only country, apart from those in the southern latitudes, which is unvisited by one of the year’s seasons—winter. The reason may be, some say, that it is not far from the torrid zone, and that the fiery heat which insensibly emanates thence warms all its surroundings. It may be, again, that the clouds are used up beforehand by the flooding of the river at the summer solstice. 115. The river begins to rise as the summer opens, and ceases when it ceases, and during that time the Etesian winds sweep down opposite to the mouths of the Nile and put a stop to its outflow through them. For as the sea rises to a great height through the violence of the winds, extending its huge billows like a long wall, it coops the river up within; and then as the stream which flows from the upland springs, and the other which should find its way out but is driven inland by the obstacles which face it, meet each other, prevented as they are from expanding by the banks which compress them on either side, the river naturally rises aloft. 116. Another possible reason is that winter is unneeded in Egypt. For the river, by making a lake of the fields, and thus producing the yearly crops, serves the purpose of rainfall. 117. And, indeed, nature is no wastrel in her work, to provide rain for a land which
does not want it. At the same time she rejoices to employ her science in works of manifold variety, and thus out of contrarieties form the harmony of the universe. And therefore she supplies the benefit of water to some from heaven above, to others from the springs and rivers below. (Mos., 1.114–117)

There is a lot going on in these verses. We learn that the Egyptians only had three seasons (Mos., 1.114), the river’s flood is connected with the Etesian winds (Mos., 1.114), the floodwaters the crops and thus is responsible for agricultural abundance, and finally, that it hardly ever rains (Mos., 1.118). This picture of life in Egypt is supported in a number of literary texts. The seasons and the understanding of the flood can also be seen in the writings of Herodotus and other Greek writers as well. However, his insider’s experiences of the land would also have given him keen insight into the cycle of the river and the results of its flood. This description appears prior to the discussion of the plague of hail and storming. It is as if Philo wants to set the scene for how the environment appears before explaining how it changed as a result of God’s anger. Here we see the changes that took place:

Such was the condition of the land, enjoying springtime at mid-winter, the seaboard enriched by only slight showers, while the parts above Memphis, where the royal palace of Egypt was, experienced no rainfall at all, when suddenly a complete change came over the air, and all the visitations which belong to a severe winter fell upon it in a body: rainstorms, a great quantity of heavy hail, violent winds, clashing and roaring against each other, cloudbursts, continuous claps of thunder and flashes of lightning and constant thunderbolts. These last provided a most marvelous spectacle, for they ran through the hail, their natural antagonist, and yet did not melt it nor were quenched by it, but unchanged coursed up and down and kept guard over the hail. (Mos., 1.118)
The weather here is the normal weather of Upper Egypt. There is a fantastic element to all of this insofar as the hail did not extinguish the fire caused by the flashes of lightning. A similar picture of the inefficacy of water to fire is also seen in the *Wisdom of Solomon*, especially in chapter 19.

What is clear from this pericope is that according to Philo, the environment of Egypt changed by the hand of God. However, the plagues did not affect everyone but only the Egyptians. This evidence suggests that there is a distinction made between the Egyptians and the land of Egypt. Similar to the *Wisdom of Solomon*, God controls the environment so that some are spared the devastating effects of the punishments (*Mos.*, 1.143).

Philo incorporates many descriptions of the natural environment of Egypt. In the example above, we see how he uses his understanding of the physical world to emphasize the destructive nature of one of the plagues. In this case, the plague brought a winter storm to a land that had never experienced winter. By describing in detail the normal environment, Philo is able, through an enhanced effect of contrast, to show the disruptive and destructive nature of the plagues. Furthermore, I argue that while the Egyptians are understood as having an improper view of the natural world, the environment of Egypt is not specifically tied to them, as was sometimes the case with texts composed outside of Egypt. The fact that the plagues did not touch the Hebrews shows how the Jewish God wielded control, to punish some but spare others. In this way, Philo could discuss the many benefits and pleasant features of the environment of Egypt, features that he no doubt enjoyed and benefitted from greatly. The sheer number of references to the environment throughout Philo’s *Life of Moses* suggests not only an awareness but a kind of topophilia, a love of the place of Egypt (or at least Alexandria). Philo seems to be infactuated or intensely interested in demonstrating the features of the land and how the normal weather of Egypt was changed as a result of the plagues. While his descriptions of Egypt are often paralleled in other Greek texts, I argue that it was not solely his education that gave him this view of Egypt; rather, it was his engagements within the land itself. In other words, his experiences helped to shape his views on Egypt, which we see clearly articulated in his version of the exodus account.
3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the shift in attitudes towards the Nile in Egypt as found in Jewish literature. Thinking about the importance of place, both as a kind of *topophilia* and as an experience, allows us a different perspective on the Jews of Egypt. Rather than focus on the differences among texts, by considering the fluvial environment as a place that the Jews became attached to and experienced, we can see how this may have been incorporated, both consciously and unconsciously, into their literature as their home. Drawing on theories of place and specifically on the concept of *topophilia*, I have shown how the Nile became a place for the Jews in Jewish Egyptian literature. Thinking about the Nile as a place allows us to consider how experiences within the environment were profoundly influential for individual Jewish writers, and likely to their audiences as well. The exodus narratives from Egypt provide us with a small window into the development of a Jewish appreciation for the Nile. While a greater study is needed to see how this thesis holds up with other Jewish compositions from Egypt, this brief analysis suggests that writing in Egypt changed how the land of Egypt and the Egyptian people were characterized in Jewish texts.

The next chapter will explore how the flooding of the Nile was specifically invoked in the exodus narratives from Egypt. Building on Greek and Egyptians theories of floods and flooding, I will show how the Jews developed their own ideas about the flood in the context of the formative narrative of the exodus.

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Chapter 4

4 The Quest for Origins: Jewish Perspectives on the Source of the Nile Flood

4.1 Introduction

For all of the inhabitants of Egypt, the annual inundation was a habitual part of their cultural, religious, and everyday lives. Different theories on the cause of the Nile flood circulated during the Ptolemaic and Roman period. The Egyptians believed that the flood came from underground springs and issued forth from the primordial Nun. The Greeks, by contrast, developed theories involving the Etesian winds, melting snow, and the sun. While the Egyptians were more concerned with who brought the flood rather than how and where it came from to them, the Greeks (and later the Romans) were obsessed with locating the precise origins of the flood.¹ In Jewish literature, the only theories regarding the Nile flood appear in texts composed in Egypt and should therefore be understood in the context of contemporary Egyptian and Greek ideas about the flood.

Having previously explored the shift in perspectives towards the land of Egypt in Jewish texts, this chapter will investigate theories on the origins of the Nile flood found in three of the exodus narratives from Egypt. I assert that Jewish authors not only borrowed ideas from their cultural neighbours about the flood, but that they combined contemporary Egyptian and Greek conceptions of the Nile with their own traditional practices and beliefs, ultimately forming a distinct perspective concerning the origins of the inundation of the Nile.

While scholars have extensively analyzed the Egyptian and Greek perspectives on the source of the flood,² the views of the Jewish inhabitants of Egypt have received comparatively

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¹ Bonneau, *Crue*, 135: “ils on dit par qui venait l’inondation, et non comment.”

little attention. This chapter then considers how different ideas of the Nile shaped Jewish exodus narratives. While Jews were shaped by their experiences firsthand, we should also situate them in their socio-cultural milieu. As Soja’s understanding of the lived environment as the intersection of a physical environment with a conceptual one, this chapter aims to bring the conceptual aspect to the forefront of the discussion, showing its importance to situating the Jews within Egypt. By looking at how Egyptian, Greek, and Roman ideas/theories may have shaped Jewish narratives about the flood, we can further illuminate the complexities of Jewish life in Egypt.

4.2 The Nile River and the Flood Cycle

The Nile River is one of the longest rivers in the world. The earliest fluvial beginnings of the river can be traced to both Ethiopia (Blue Nile) and Rwanda (or Burundi) in East Africa (White Nile). At the ancient city of Khartoum in Sudan, the two Niles (Blue Nile and White Nile) converge and flow together through Sudan and Egypt eventually feeding into the Mediterranean Sea. Due to the arability of the Nile Valley and the human requirements for water, it is unsurprising that the vast majority of cities and villages were established along the Nile River or one of its main tributaries. For the inhabitants of Egypt, the river served as the primary source of fresh water and the main transportation channel. As a source of fresh water, it was vital for drinking, cooking, and agricultural production. The river was also a place for fishing and hunting. As a transportation channel, it served as the quickest way to transport goods or individuals from one city to another making it formative in the development of local economies. Moreover, it connected the Red Sea to the Mediterranean, further facilitating commerce across the country.

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3 I have only found one significant discussion on the topic. See Pearce, “Philo on the Nile,” 137–57. Also see an earlier version of this article in Pearce, The Land of the Body.

4 For a detailed description of the hydrological context of the Nile Delta (and the Nile more generally), see Blouin, Triangular Landscapes, especially 13–36. For a more geological understanding of the Nile River, see Said, The River Nile, especially 32–56 (“The Egyptian Nile,”), 95–171 (“Hydrology of the River Nile”), and 175–256 (“The Utilization of the Waters of the Nile”).

From the perspective of the state, the Nile served as a location for the demonstration of political power. The control and management of water was one way that the ruling powers asserted their dominance. This was achieved primarily through the construction of irrigation canals, aqueducts, and channels. Since water is vital to life, altering where it goes and how it is distributed can cause significant shifts in the livelihoods of many people. This management and distribution played a central role in the political life of ancient rulers, and even continues to occupy an important place in modern political discussions insofar as the Nile continues to be a shared resource. However, management was not simply controlled by the state, but functioned at a local level. As discussed by many, the management of the flood was often locally organized. While the state played a role, local organizations and groups were deeply involved in its administration.

The Nile flood cycle divided the year into three seasons: inundation, sowing, and harvest. The inundation season (akhet in Egyptian) began with the first rise of the Nile in June. This period (June through September) was characterized by a steady increase in the water level,

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6 Rulers also asserted their power through the construction and display of royal barges. Dorothy J. Thompson points out how barges were symbols of power used by the state to assert military dominance and to show off the decadence of the royals. In describing one such barge, Thompson summarizes Plutarch’s claim that the ships were not only “beautiful but also good for fighting, combining magnificence of equipment with practical use; their speed and manoeuvrability were, Plutarch reports, even more remarkable than their great size.” The presence of these barges was important for showing military prowess and for maintaining an aura of confidence around the ruling powers. Dorothy J. Thompson, “Hellenistic Royal Barges,” in *The Ptolemies, the Sea, and the Nile*, 187. For a discussion on the relationships between power and water use, see Lisa J. Lucero, *Water and Ritual: The Rise and Fall of Classic Maya Rulers* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006).

7 One example of how the Nile River continues to be a topic of fierce debate in modern political discussions, see: https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/articles/africa/11902-cairo-and-khartoum-caught-in-the-winds-of-the-ethiopian-dam

8 The anachronistic model of Hydraulic despotism has been challenged since the 1970s. Blouin addresses this in her volume (*Triangular Landscapes*, 21) in a discussion on representation and management of fluvial resources in Egypt. Moreover, J. G. Manning devotes a chapter to the despotism model (“Moving Beyond Despotism, Economic Planning, and State Banditry,” in *The Last Pharaohs: Egypt Under the Ptolemies, 305–30 BC* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010], 55–72). For more specific examples, see Barry J. Kemp’s study that argues that there was no monolithic system in Egypt for administrating or managing the flood cycle (Barry J. Kemp, *Ancient Egypt: Anatomy of a Civilization* [2d edition; London: Routledge, 2006], 304–8).

9 The Egyptian seasons were different from other cultures. For example, the Greeks divided the year into four seasons: Fall, Winter, Spring, Summer. For a discussion on how the Greeks attempted to map their understanding of seasons upon the Egyptian system see: Bonneau, *Crue*, 34. For a broader discussion see Bonneau, *Crue*, 33–38). Usually, the Greeks dropped one of their seasons to explain the division of the year in Egypt, though there was no uniformity in terms of which season was dropped.
to the point where the river would burst over its regular boundary flooding the land. By September, the flood reached its maximum height, ushering in the second season, sowing (peret). During this time, the crops and produce were sown as the water level began to lower. The winter equinox ushered in the harvesting season (shemou). From December to May, all the various crops were harvested as the Nile waters continued to recede. By May, the river reached its lowest levels marking the end of the harvesting season. At this time, farmers would eagerly look forward to the beginnings of the rise in June. As explained by the Roman orator Aelius Aristides (117–187 CE), “Not only is the Nile’s increase orderly, but it also recedes in an orderly fashion, and it returns to its original state in almost no less time than the time from its rising to cresting.” A description of this habitual, natural, and orderly event is vital for understanding the centrality of the river to life in Egypt.

The exact cause of the flood was not known in the ancient world. While different theories existed, it was not until 1613 that the true reasons for the flood were understood. The increased flow in the summer months was the result of melting snow in the Ethiopian mountains. In the spring, the snow would begin to melt causing a rapid increase in the amount of water that comprised the Blue Nile. On its way down the mountain, the rushing water would pick up nourishing silt from the ground, which would eventually be deposited on the croplands located along the banks of the Nile.

While today the fluvial beginnings of the Blue Nile in Ethiopia are understood as both the cause of the flood and the origins of the (Blue) Nile River, in the ancient world, the beginnings of the river and the source of the waters of the flood were often viewed as distinct natural events. Oftentimes, different reasons were offered to explain them, sometimes relating to vastly different geographic regions. An examination into why this was the case will further explicate the reasons for which the river was important for life in Egypt.

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12 While the cause of the flood was investigated for centuries, the first accurate description of its source was composed in 1613 by Pedro Paez. However, it was not until the mid nineteenth century that people were able to penetrate the Nile beyond the Sudd swamps which took place under the rule of Mohammed Ali, founder of modern Egypt (Said, “In Search of the Sources of the Nile,” in *The River Nile*, 102–7; Bonneau, *Crue*, 378 n. 1).
4.3 The Sacred Flood Water

In antiquity, the origins of the Nile River were not always equated with the cause of the Nile flood. Oftentimes, the regular Nile water (the river water when the Nile was not in flood) was considered a completely different substance from the floodwater. This is reflected in the terminology used by the ancient Egyptians. The river was called *Iteru*, meaning ‘river,’ whereas the flood was referred to as *Hapi*, the divinization of the flood.\(^{13}\) Part of the reasoning behind this view was the different appearance of the floodwater that was red due to the thick layer of accompanying silt. This reddish water was valued more highly than the regular river water due to its agricultural and life-giving properties.\(^{14}\) Moreover, the floodwater, in contrast to the regular river water, was considered *sacred water* and was honoured in religious ceremonies, worshiped as a god (*Hapi*), sacrificed to, and prayed towards.\(^{15}\) It was also deeply tied to Egyptian cosmogonies, for example, the mythological story of Isis and Osiris. The basic narrative focuses on king Osiris who was murdered by his evil brother Seth and later resurrected by his spouse Isis.\(^{16}\) Interpretations of the narrative view the annual flood as representing Osiris who unites with the earth, represented by Isis, when the floodwaters pour over the land. The rising of the waters is interpreted as Osiris’ resurrection, whereas the decent of the waters shows Osiris’ battle with Seth.\(^{17}\)

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14 According to Susanne Bickel, the Egyptians never conceived of the Nile in negative terms. See Bickel, “Creative and Destructive Waters,” 191–200.

15 E.g., *P. Oxy* 2782; *P. Oxy* III no. 486; *P. Oxy* IX no. 1211; *P. Oxy* XII no. 1409; *P. Mich* vol. 9 no. 617; *P. Oxy* XXIV no. 2409; and *P. Oxy* XLII no. 3167.

16 Seth, who was jealous of Osiris’ popularity as a king, trapped him inside a casket and threw it into the Nile. Isis bewails his death and searches for his body in order to give him a proper burial. When she finds his body she brings it back home, but before she can give him a burial, Seth finds out and cuts Osiris’ body into pieces distributing them all over Egypt. Isis once again goes searching for Osiris’ body and finds all pieces except his penis. Through a magical event she is able to bring him back to life for long enough to conceive a son named Horus. Eventually Horus avenges the death of his father through a series of battles with Seth.

17 A good general source for determining the early history of the Isis and Osirian myths continues to be the Dictionary of Egyptian Civilization with entries by Serge Sauneron and Jean Yoyette (Georges Posener, ed. *Dictionnaire de la Civilisation Égyptienne* [Paris: F. Hazan, 1959]). A later example of this myth can be found in the writings of Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris*, 32: “so among the Egyptians Osiris is the Nile uniting with Isis as the earth, while Typhon is the sea into which the Nile falls and so disappears and is dispersed, save for that part which the earth takes up and receives, becoming fertile through it.” Translation by Griffiths, *Plutarch’s De Iside et Osiride*,
The Greeks also held the floodwater in higher esteem than the regular river water. According to Robert Wild, the flood water was thought to contain special healing properties causing healing, rapid growth, weight gain, increased offspring, ease of pregnancy, and nourishment to the body. An example of the high value placed upon the floodwater can be seen in the Ptolemaic and Roman practice of exporting this water from Egypt to other places in the Mediterranean because of its perceived sacred properties. This special water was used primarily in religious rituals and ceremonies, often in the cult worship of Isis. Another example of the sacredness of the Nile appears in the appellation that developed in the Roman period, “the most Sacred Nile” (τοῦ ἱερωτάτου Νείλου) which became a common expression given to the Nile.

While both the Egyptians and the Greeks understood the Nile floodwater as something beneficial and special, neither was entirely certain of the origins of this magical water. Both the Greeks and the Romans were aware that the Nile River originated somewhere in Ethiopia; however, Ethiopia was not always viewed as the origins the Nile floodwater. For the remainder of this chapter, I will focus specifically on different perspectives of the cause of the Nile flood and leave aside a discussion on the source of the river. Sometimes hypotheses about the Nile flood overlap with those of the source of the river, but not always. Therefore, I will devote my attention to the flood as presented in Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and Jewish sources.

18 Wild, Water in the Cultic Worship of Isis and Sarapis, 89–97.
19 An interesting example of the transportation of water for religious purposes was addressed in a paper given by Pascal Vernus. In 1983 several amphora were discovered at Saqqara. They contained an inscription that the water inside was originally from the Xoite Nome. Xois was known to have a Osirian cult that was deeply connected with the Nile, as pointed out by Vernus. Plutarch, for example, acknowledges that Xois had a Nilometer and a sanctuary dedicated to the flood (Isis and Oisis 36). Vernus argues that the water was transported because of the sacredness of the water at Xois, derived from its location at the end of the Nile river (in the Delta region). It was in Xois that the Nile floodwater pooled and turned into a lake resembling the primordial ocean. The paper therefore argues that water was transported as it was seen as sacred. Pascal Vernus, “L’eau sainte de Xois,” in The Archaeology, Geography and History of the Egyptian Delta in Pharaonic Times, Proceedings of the Colloquium, Wadham College, 29–31 August 1988 (Discussions in Egyptology 13; Oxford, 1989), 53–60.
4.3.1 Egyptian Perspectives

4.3.1.1 The Flood in Egyptian Mythology and Belief

The Nile, and in particular its annual flood cycle influenced the Egyptian calendar, festival celebrations, and cosmology. The Egyptians believed that the flood came each year by the benevolence of the gods and that the exact height of the flood was the direct result of the relations between the Pharaoh and the gods (e.g. an ideal flood height represented good relations, while a flood which was too high or too low represented poor ones).\(^{21}\) The Egyptians theorized that the water from the flood came either from below the earth or from the primordial waters, although they were more concerned with the one responsible for bringing the flood, linking the flood to Egyptian theology.

In the Pharaonic tradition, the Egyptians believed that the flood came by the orders of the gods. According to Danielle Bonneau, the particular god associated with the Nile often depended upon political circumstances.\(^ {22}\) While nearly all of the Egyptian deities were at one point associated with the flood in some way, Thoth, Amon, Osiris, and Isis are some of the most prominent examples. Thoth was the god of Hermopolis Magna and Hermopolis Parva and caused the floodwaters to come from below the ground. He was connected with the calendar month of Thoth and the rise of the star called Sothis (which rose at the same time as the initial rise of the Nile). He was considered the god of the exact moment of the rise and was sometimes connected to Osiris in legendary narratives (Pyr 639).\(^ {23}\) From the New Kingdom (c. 1550–1070 BCE) to the Roman period, the god Amon was the dispenser of the flood.\(^ {24}\) This may be further exemplified in the connection drawn by several scholars that the name Amon is an old word that originally referred to water. Amon is depicted as the master of water and later became the equivalent of the

\(^{21}\) The ideal height of the flood was sixteen cubits (cf. P. Lond Lit. 239).

\(^{22}\) For a discussion of the associations between the gods and the Nile see Bonneau, Crue, 232–38.

\(^{23}\) In the Roman period, Thoth is likened to Mercury (e.g. Lucan, Ph. X 209; 214–15). The Nile is also sometimes referred to as the ‘wave of Thoth.’ (Bonneau, Crue, 234–36).

\(^{24}\) An example of this can be found in the “Hymn to Amon” in P. Leyde 1350 (XIX). Cf. Budge, From Fetish to God, 414.
Sun god Rah and the Greek god Zeus. Osiris’ connections with the inundation date back as early as the Old Kingdom (c. 2649–2150 BCE) and continued to be popular into the Roman period. As a god associated with the afterlife and the flood, he commonly appears in reliefs presenting fresh purifying waters to the deceased, a symbolic offering that signified purification, rejuvenation, and immortality. In purification spell 436 from the Pyramid Texts, we see an early example of the connections between Osiris and the inundation:

May your water belong to you,
May your inundation belong to you,
the discharge that comes out of the god
the foul exudation that comes out of Osiris.
Washed are your hands, opened are your ears,
transfigured in this mighty one for his ba.
Wash yourself, may your ka wash itself,
may your ka sit down to eat bread with you,
without cease, forever. (Pyr 436)

Not only does this passage connect the inundation with Osiris, specifically as a bodily discharge, but it also gives insight into ritual washing practices before eating. As Jan Assmann points out

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25 Bonneau, *Crue*, 237–38. In later periods, the names Amon-Re and Amon-Zeus came to represent mastery of the god Amon over the flood. In Egyptian the word is mw.

26 Maria Constanze Centrone claims that the connections between Osiris and water. In an early Pyramid Text (Old Kingdom) (1748a), we find a command to: “Wash your hands in this fresh water which your father Osiris has given you.” (Maria Constanze Centrone, “‘This is the Form of [ . . . ] Osiris of the Mysteries, who Springs from the Returning Waters’ (South Wall of the Osiris Room at the Great Temple at Philae)” in *L’acqua nell’antico Egitto: vita, rigenerazione, incantesimo, medicamento: proceedings of the first International Conference for Young Egyptologists: Italy, Chianciano Terme, October 15–18, 2003* (ed. A. Amenta, M. M. Luiselli, and M. N. Sordi; Roma: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 2005), 356 (Pyramid Text 1748a). This “fresh water” was a popular expression referring to the Nile water, which is fresh not, salt water. Other Pyramid Texts describe this water as the efflux of Osiris, “cool waters,” purifying waters, and life giving water.

27 The main ideas presented here are twofold; Osiris as the god of the dead (and the afterlife) was linked to water in the sense of purification and preparation of the deceased for the afterlife. For more on this subject, see Centrone, “This is the Form,” 357; J. Gwyn Griffiths, *The Origins of Osiris and his Cult* (Leiden: Brill, 1981); Martin Bommas, “Situlae and the Offering of Water in the Divine Funerary Cult: A New Approach to the Ritual of Djeme,” *L’acqua nell’antico Egitto*, 257–72, especially 263–64 and 268–69; and Marie-Eve Colin, “Presenting Water to the Deities within the Barque Sanctuaries of Graeco-Roman Times,” in *L’acqua nell’antico Egitto*, 283–92.
about this text, this libation “has the sense of washing the hands before eating” denoting its
collection to a ritual practice.\textsuperscript{28}

Moreover, as Maria Constanze Centrone illuminates, “The Nile, and especially the Nile
in flood was a manifestation of the power of Osiris, the dead king who also ruled over natural
phenomenon.”\textsuperscript{29} It was this power that continued to relate the flood to this figure in his
development and was ritually remembered through funerary ceremonies of the deceased. The
goddess Isis was also connected with the Nile flood as the one who initiated the deluge. There
are many different accounts of her connection with the flood. In one, it was her tears that
initiated the flood, in another it was the flapping of her wings, and a third claims that her hair
appears in the first floodwaters.\textsuperscript{30}

Whereas the precise deity who ordered the flood changed depending on the political
context, the lower god Hapi remained consistently associated with the inundation from the
Ancient Empire to the Roman period.\textsuperscript{31} Sometimes acting more like a genie than a deity, Hapi
was the divinization of the flood, and was often depicted assisting the Pharaoh in making the
necessary offerings to ensure a proper flood season.\textsuperscript{32} Furthermore, Hapi figurines were regularly
thrown into the Nile as an offering to the river in the hopes that the act would bring about a good
flood season. While the people performed rituals to help ensure a good flood, it was ultimately at
the discretion of the gods to dispense the required waters and the Pharaoh held much of the
responsibility of appeasing the gods.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{28} Jan Assmann, \textit{Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt} (trans. David Lorton; Ithaca: Cornell University Press,
2001), 356.
\textsuperscript{29} Centrone, “This is the Form,” 358.
\textsuperscript{30} For a detailed discussion on each of these interpretations see page 122 n. 42 in chapter three of this study.
\textsuperscript{31} Bonneau, “La divinité du Nil sous le principat en Égypte,” 3195–3215.
\textsuperscript{32} Moret, \textit{Le Nil}, 233, 505.
\textsuperscript{33} Bonneau, \textit{Crue}, 313.
4.3.1.2 The Source of the Flood in the Egyptian Perspective

According to Bonneau, the Egyptians had two main theories regarding the source of the floodwaters: the sky and the depths. The two theories are represented in various depictions of Hapi, where he appears as a double Hapi.34 Whereas sometimes the double Hapi symbolized the two kingdoms of Egypt (North and South) or the different states of the Nile (in flood and not in flood), it is thought that it also represented the two theoretical perspectives of the origins of the Nile, aerial and terrestrial.

The origins of the aerial theory have been traced back to Hermopolis Magna, an ancient city in Upper Egypt, where the cult of Thoth was particularly popular. The understanding of the cosmos as surrounded by water informed its development. The Egyptians believed that water stemmed from a primordial element, which they called Nun.35 They thought that the entire cosmos was created out of this primordial Nun. The creation of the world was understood as a separation of the waters to form land and sky. Bonneau argues that the receding waters of the flood and the sudden “appearance” of the earth from beneath the water likely inspired this theological interpretation of the formation of the earth.36 The Egyptians believed that the Nile was born out of this primordial Nun and that its annual flood came directly from the Nun.37 The floodwaters, therefore, were issued forth from the primordial Nun and so it was important to honour the element of water in their religious ritual ceremonies. They connected the presence of equatorial rains with the Nile flood issuing forth from the primordial Nun.

The aerial theory is attested explicitly in several later Greek texts.38 Horapollo, in his writings called the Hieroglyphics, mentions three different causes of the flood from the perspective of the Egyptians: the earth, the ocean, and southern rains.39

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34 Some examples include the Bigeh Island relief and the “fish gods” statue from the twenty-first dynasty from the Tanis region.
35 Philo was also familiar with this principle of the Egyptians. See Mos., 1.98.
36 Bonneau, Crue, 63. A similar idea appears in Gen 2:7.
37 This tradition can be seen in later Greek and Roman descriptions of the Nile in flood as an ocean.
38 Horapollo, Hier., 21; Aristides, The Egyptian Discourse, 25.
39 Horapollo, Hier., 21.
the rise of the Nile, according to them, takes place in three ways. One they attribute to the land of Egypt, for it produces water. And another to the ocean, for water is borne into Egypt by the ocean at the time of the rise. The third is rain-storms, which are produced in the southern parts of Ethiopia, at the time of the rising of the Nile. (Horapollo, *Hier.*, 21)

Although this text was written in the fifth century CE, there remains an awareness of the connection of the flood with the ocean (or the primordial waters of the Nun as the Egyptians understood it) and southern rains which came from the sky. This provides us with two possible variations of aerial theories, from the ocean (understood as surrounding the world) and from the sky, or perhaps could be seen as variations of the same view (as I presented them above).

The far more attested perspective is that the floodwaters came from the depths, as pointed out by Henri Frankfort.\(^40\) In Egyptian Pyramid Texts, the depths were identified with granite rocks, rapids, and whirling currents.\(^41\) These features corresponded nicely to the cataracts found at Aswan, implying that this site inspired the theory of the subterranean source. It is justifiable to believe that there existed some subterranean source at Aswan, since this would have been the area where the Egyptian first detected the rise every year.\(^42\)

The cataracts as the location of the source of the flood can be seen in several Egyptian references always in connection with a particular deity. In a funerary inscription from the New Empire we see associations made between the caverns of the Nile and the figure of Osiris.\(^43\) Another funerary text, from the Temple of Isis at Philae, describes the Nile exiting from beneath

\(^{40}\) In *Pyr.* 765, the flood comes forth “from the cataract,” that is, the cataracts at Aswan. Translation by Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 190. In another example, the Hymn to Aten, the flood appears below the feet of the god: “He [Aten] entereth, the two caverns are below his feet. The Nile appeareth from the hollow beneath his sandals.” Translation by Budge, *From Fetish to God*, 414. A visual representation of this image can be found in the Bigeh relief of Hapi in the Roman period.

\(^{41}\) Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, 190: “The place where the Nile broke forth from the depths had been identified by the early Egyptians with the weird granite rocks, the rapids, and the whirling currents of the cataracts of Assuan.”

\(^{42}\) Bonneau, *Crue*, 63. The Greeks also made similar observations. See for example, Aristides, *The Egyptian Discourse* (XXXVI), 119 (“It is like a single spring for the whole land); Plato, *Tim.* 22e (“it all tends naturally to well up from below”); Herodotus, *Hist.*, 2.28 (discussion on the springs of the Nile).

the feet of Osiris, who rules both lands (Upper and Lower Egypt). The Hymn to Aten presents a similar picture: “He [Amon] entereth, the two caverns beneath his feet. The Nile appeareth from the hollow beneath his sandals.” What are common in these examples are the associations between the depths and the gods. This illustrates the focus of the Egyptian concerns about the Nile flood in that they were far more concerned with who rather than locating the precise reason or location of the flood.

According to Herodotus, the Egyptians did not know exactly where the flood’s source could be found and he is somewhat perplexed at their ignorance. However, as Bonneau points out, the silence by the Egyptians concerning the cause of the flood was not out of ignorance, but out of respect. The Egyptians held the Nile water, and in particular the flood water, in such high regard, that their focus was on honouring it as the principle of life rather than out of scientific curiosity. Despite conclusions drawn by that the Egyptians were ignorant, instead, it seems that they simply had a different explanation based on their theological beliefs and their subsequent interests in the habitual and normalized aspect of their daily and cultic lives.

4.3.2 Greek Perspectives

4.3.2.1 The Greeks and the Nile Flood

Prior to the conquest of Egypt by Alexander of Macedon, the Greeks believed that the Nile was magical, mysterious, and unlike any other river in the world. Rumors abounded about the benefits of the floodwater. Yet despite all of the purported benefits, for many early Greek

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44 Émile Chassinat, BIFAO 3 (1903), 154.
45 The “Hymn to Aten” in Budge, From Fetish to God, 413–14.
46 Herodotus, Hist., 2.28
47 Bonneau, Crue, 135; Moret, Nil, 7.
48 Herodotus, Hist., 2.19.
49 Wild, Water in the Cultic Worship of Isis and Sarapis, 89–97.
50 In Archalaus, the tragedian Euripides called the Nile “the most lovely water in the world” (Archalaus 228, line 2). Herodotus further explained that the river had a nature different from all other rivers which he argued accounted for
writers (in particular sixth century Ionian Philosophers), the flooding of the Nile was a puzzle to
be solved. These writers stressed that the Nile was completely backwards in its flow (the water
running northwards rather than southwards) and that the timing of its flood was problematic (in
the summer instead of the winter). This approach to the flooding of the Nile is vastly different
than how the Egyptians viewed the flood. As Phiroze Vasunia explains, “the desire to explain the
behavior of the Nile is more a Greek than an Egyptian obsession.”51 As a problem, these early
Greek philosophers developed numerous theories to account for this strange behavior involving
melting snow, equatorial rains, and the action of the sun. Bonneau argues that the Greeks
developed six different views on the flood (some borrowed from Egyptian views): Ocean,
Etesian winds, melting snow, subterranean spring, sun, and equatorial rains.52

Following the conquest of Alexander and the establishment of the Ptolemaic dynasty, the
Greek inhabitants of Egypt continued their quest to understand the origins of the Nile in order to
harness its powers for economic gain. Much of this interest spurred from Alexander’s imperial
goals. As Vasunia writes, “Alexander’s interest in the river’s source exemplifies the collusion of
science and imperialism that characterized much of his campaign.”53 The more scientific
approach to the Nile flood combined with Alexander’s quest to rule over various territories
resulted in more nuanced theories of the flood.

While no innovative Greek theories regarding the flood’s origins developed after 325
BCE, we do see a continued interest in understanding the flood and the expansions upon (and
often refutations of) previously discussed theories. One example is the melting snow hypothesis
that was developed by the Ionian philosopher Anaxagore (pre-Socratic). The theory was later

51 Vasunia, The Gift of the Nile, 276. However, we see an interest in the origins of bodies of water in several other
cultures as well. For a good introduction to the myths of the various bodies of water in ancient Greek myths, see
Tauris Publishers, 1997).
52 Bonneau, Crue, 143–208.
discussed by Herodotus, Seneca, Lucan, Pliny the Elder, to name only a few. Yet, debates arose as to where the snow was located, ranging from Ethiopia, to Mauretania (West African Coast), to the East. Thus, variations on the theory developed which depended on the location of the melting snow. The way that later Greek authors interacted with previous Greek authors demonstrates how there was an entire conversation happening about the Nile flood, not simply a few authors individually. This resulted in more nuanced versions of these popular Greek (or originally Egyptian) theories.

4.3.2.2 Greek Perspectives of the Flood in Egypt

The early Greek migrants were deeply indebted to Herodotus for their conceptions of Egypt and the Nile. The best example can be seen in the Greek conceptions of the Egyptians as a backwards people. In his *Histories*, Herodotus explained that the river had a “nature different from all other rivers” which he argued accounted for the nature of the Egyptians (35). The nature of the Egyptians is exemplified in its river, which flows South to North and in the wrong season. Therefore, the Egyptians were seen as backwards and inferior people when compared to the Greeks, and the justification for this belief was found in the river. The views of Herodotus concerning the inhabitants of Egypt and the Nile had a significant impact on how subsequent Greek writers conceived of Egypt (and Egyptians).

Bonneau argues that when the Greeks migrated to Egypt, they brought with them different views of the Nile and flooding. The new idea was that of the *vindictive flood*, whereby a bad flood was viewed as a punishment from the gods. The Egyptians, by contrast, viewed the Nile flood as entirely beneficent. A bad flood season (a flood that was either too high or too low) was not seen as a punishment from the gods; rather, they maintained a positive perspective—at least in official texts.

54 Bonneau, *Crue*, 169, 201.
55 For a discussion on how the early Greek writers influenced the conquest of Alexander see Vasunia, *The Gift of the Nile*.
56 Bonneau, *Crue*, 306–13: in the Roman period, the Nile was seen to function as an instrument of justice.
In the Greek view, the acts of the sovereign were reflected in the inundation of the Nile. While the responsibility of a good flood was controlled by the power of the sovereign, the Ptolemies also introduced the idea of a “collective responsibility” concerning the inundation. Thus, the burden did not fall solely on the sovereigns (as it often did with the Egyptian pharaohs), but also upon the common people. In contrast, in the Pharonic period the sovereign had magical powers over the flood, which did not depend on his willingness but on the benevolence of the gods upon him. This shift from the gods to the sovereigns (viewed as gods in some respects) marked a significant change in how the flood was conceptualized.

4.3.3 Roman Perspectives

The flood also intrigued the Romans following the conquest by Octavian in 30 BCE. They viewed the Nile River as unique and with scientific curiosity, just as their Greek predecessors. Claudian, a Roman poet, exemplified this when he claimed that the Nile is unlike any other river in the world.

The Romans were primarily concerned with understanding the flooding of the Nile in the hopes of using it to benefit them economically. Yet there also remained the view that the inundation was a problem to be solved. While some Roman writers described the quest for uncovering the source (such as Seneca), others continued to stress the mystery of the Nile (primarily Roman poets, a theme which continued into the fifth century CE). Seneca, for example, remarked that if we knew where the Nile grew then we would know the cause of its

57 Bonneau, *Crue*, 313.
58 Bonneau, *Crue*, 309: “tel était l’heritage égyptien: le Souverain avait sur la crue un pouvoir magique qui ne dépendait guère de sa volonté, mais de la bienveillance que les dieux manifestaient à son égard.”
59 *Id.*, IV II 24–27. Found in several other Roman sources as well, a topos.
60 Not only the Romans, but the rulers before them were also interested in the economic benefits of the Nile River. See for example, Manning, *The Last Pharaohs*, 117–64 “Creating a New Economic Order,” esp 157–63; Lewis, *Life in Egypt*.
61 Seneca, *Q. N.*, 4a, II. 3.
62 Bonneau, *Crue*, X.
Yet, the Nile remained an enigma as Roman poets continued to emphasize its mysteries in their writings.

Two fanciful narratives about the quest for understanding the origins of the flood illustrate the literary flourishes given over to such inquisitions. Maximus of Tyre, writing in the second century CE, explains the time when Alexander came to the shrine of Amon and upon receiving the oracle, he asked not for success but for an account of the origins of the flooding:

“They say that Alexander of Macedon, when he came to the shrine of Ammon and Ammon addressed him as his son, believed the god because of what Homer says when he calls him ‘father of gods and men’. But on receiving this oracle, he only thought fit to ask one question in return. It was not about putting Darius to flight, or about the battle he was about to fight, or the ills of Greece, or the chaos reigning in Asia; instead, as if he was quite satisfied with everything else, he asked the god where the Nile rises before flowing down into Egypt. Clearly this was the one thing he lacked for complete happiness, and on learning it he would have been content! No, he wouldn’t, for goodness sake. (Max. Tyre, Oration 41, 1)”

Maximus presents, with a sarcastic tone, the desire of Alexander to understand the origins of the Nile above all else. This second century CE orator is playing with the importance of the Nile as central to the campaign of Alexander. While we cannot expect this to have been a recounting of a real event (five centuries after the fact!), this passage does engage with the theme of knowledge and questing for origins. A quest that, in some respects, was more important than military dominance (at least this seems to be the view that Maximus is reacting against).

A similar story is presented about Caesar’s quest for understanding the origins of the flood. As described by Lucan in Pharsalia (first century CE), Caesar asks the aged Acoreus for the secret of the springs of the river in return for abandoning civil war:

“But, though such intellectual vigour and love of truth flourish in my breast, yet there is nothing I would rather learn than the causes, concealed through long ages, that account

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63 Seneca, Q. N. IVa, II. 3.
for the Nile, and the secret of its source. Give me an assured hope to set eyes on the springs of the river and I will abandon civil war.\textsuperscript{64}

In this passage, Caesar is willing to abandon his military plans in order to learn how the Nile floods. In this narrative, his humility is rewarded and Acoreus responds to his request:

To me, Caesar, it is permitted to disclose the secrets of our great ancestors—secrets hitherto known to the herd. Let others think it pious to conceal such great marvels; but I believe it the will of heaven that this fabric of theirs should be published abroad and that all men should learn their sacred laws.\textsuperscript{65}

Thus, Caesar is granted what he asks for. The source of the Nile is then described as under the control of the god Mercury, who causes the source of the river to open during a specific time of the year (based on the movement of the stars). Acoreus then goes on to explain other theories, such as the theory of melting snow and the winds. This narrative reveals how the quest to understand the flooding of the Nile continued into the Roman period. It seems to have continued as a legend, but with very real consequences for daily life.\textsuperscript{66} The sense of the uniqueness of Egypt and the Nile remained a continuous theme throughout the Roman period.\textsuperscript{67}

Having surveyed the different theories and perspectives developed by the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans towards the Nile flood, I will now explore three different reflections on the Nile flood in Jewish sources. These references can now be understood against the backdrop of the various theories and perspectives explored above. The influence of the experiences with the

\textsuperscript{64} Lucan, \textit{Ph.}, X.

\textsuperscript{65} Lucan, \textit{Ph.}, X.

\textsuperscript{66} Specifically in the Roman period, Egypt contributed a large portion of grain to the city of Rome. As a result, Rome was incredibly reliant upon Egypt's production, and by consequence, the flooding of the Nile, which was variable and could dramatically alter the amount of food produced from one year to the next. Moreover, while grain was exported throughout the Mediterranean in the Ptolemaic period, the amount of grain transported increased under the Romans.

\textsuperscript{67} As Aristides summarizes: "the situation of the Nile seems to be more divine and special than suits the case of other rivers." (Aristides, \textit{The Egyptian Discourse}, 37).
flood and the theories surrounding it will come into play in determining how the Jews used both to develop their own perspectives in line with their traditional views.

4.4 Jewish Perspectives on the Nile Flood

The importance of the Nile to life in Egypt was well known to Jews living in the Mediterranean basin. Not only were the Jews aware of the fluvial environment of Egypt, but they frequently recalled, through collective memories, their time living in the land. In the Hebrew Bible, the majority of the references to the Nile appear in the narratives of Joseph in Egypt (Gen 41) and the Exodus (Gen 41; Exod 1–14). In these accounts, the Nile is a source of wealth, prosperity, a refuge from famine, and most importantly, an instrument of the divine. The Nile also appears as a boundary marker in terms of the demarcation of territory, usually associated with the promised land.

The Egyptian river is also mentioned in the Hebrew Bible (and LXX) as metaphors of destruction or abundance. In Isaiah 19, the destruction of Egypt is foretold in terms of the drying up of the river (Isa 19:5–8). This passage acknowledges an awareness of the importance of the Nile in Egypt. In Jeremiah, the Nile represents the Egyptians (46:7–8). Just as the Nile rises, so will the Egyptians rise up and destroy towns and their inhabitants (a very negative view of the Nile flood). As mentioned previously, a more positive description of the Nile flood appears in

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68 Cf. Gen 2:10–13 (Gehon = Nile). Also, This is also picked up and elaborated upon by Josephus in Ant., 1:39 (1.1.3) “Euphrates also, as well as Tigris, goes down into the Red Sea. 4 Now the name Euphrates, or Phrath, denotes either a dispersion, or a flower: by Tigris, or Diglath, is signified what is swift, with narrowness; and Geon runs through Egypt, and denotes what arises from the east, which the Greeks call Nile.” (Translated by A. M. William Whiston, The Works of Flavius Josephus, Complete and Unabridged. New Updated Edition [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987]).

69 Evidence for a Jewish presence in Egypt date as early as the Persian period, when Jewish mercenaries established a camp at Elephantine. Moreover, connections between Egypt and Palestine have been attested for centuries prior to the Persian period demonstrating the economic and political relationship developed from an early period (Modrzejewski, The Jews of Egypt, 5–19).

70 Gen 13:10. The Nile is compared to the Garden of Eden.

71 See also Amos 8:8: “Shall not the earth shake for this? And all that dwell on it mourn? Shall it not all rise like the Nile And surge and subside like the Nile of Egypt?” And Amos 9:5, “It is my Lord the GOD of Hosts At whose touch the earth trembles And all who dwell on it mourn, And all of it swells like the Nile And subsides like the Nile of Egypt.”
the Book of Ben Sira that likens the Nile to the overflow of divine instruction, God’s blessings, and the wisdom of King Solomon in his youth (Sir 24.27; 39.22; 47.14). Yet, despite all these references to the Nile River, no discussion on the cause of the flooding of the Nile is ever discussed in the biblical texts. This changed in the Ptolemaic period as Jews began migrating in large numbers to the land of Egypt.

When Jews migrated to Egypt in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, they established communities all throughout the region and lived alongside other cultural groups. These Jews quickly became familiar with the social-cultural and environmental realities of living alongside the Nile. While we see in several sources an awareness of the Nile and its annual flood cycle, several Jewish texts do more than regurgitate the theories of the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans. Rather, we see that the Jews were interested in developing their own theories and perspectives regarding the Nile River.

4.4.1 Moses Initiated the Nile Flood: Artapanus

Artapanus’ description of the Nile flood is best understood against the backdrop of his descriptions of the figure of Moses. According to Artapanus, Moses was not only a highly esteemed exemplary figure, but he was an inventor (of boats, implements for war and drawing water, and the Egyptian religion), administrator (tasked with dividing the land into districts [Nomes]), and the first philosopher. Moses is also frequently set in contrast to Isis (Moses being

72 The Greek Sirach uses potamos, while our earliest sources for these verses in Hebrew dating to the twelfth century contain ye’or. However, I think that it is entirely plausible that the original word in Hebrew was not ye’or but nahal or nahar instead.

73 A significant change that took place following this migration under the Ptolemies was the translation of the Torah into Greek. Cf. Honigman, The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria.

74 According to Josephus, many Jews were taken captive by Ptolemy I and brought to the city of Alexandria (although, he also mentions that some Jews went willingly) (Ant. 12.1–9). Cf. Let. Aris. 12–27 (Wright, Letter of Aristeas, 124–36. For two general introductions to the settlement of the Jews throughout Egypt, see the following sources: Honigman, “Jewish Communities of Hellenistic Egypt: Different Responses to Different Environments,” 117–35; Modrzejewski, The Jews of Egypt.

75 Examples include: Gen 10: 13; 15:18; 41; Exod 1–14; Isa 19; Jer 46:7–8; Amos 8:8; 1Qap Gen ar col. XXIX 11–13; Sir 24:27; 39:22; 47:14; Jdt 1:9; Ezek. Trag. 31; Sib. Or. 3.320; 5.54–58, 92; 11.241–243, 300–301, 305.
superior of course), and is associated with other popular deities such as Thoth and Orpheus\(^{76}\) (Praep. Ev. 3.27.4).\(^{77}\) For Artapanus, Moses is comparable to other Greek and Egyptian deities, and perhaps arguably was understood as a deity himself.\(^{78}\)

According to Artapanus, Moses is the one who caused the Nile to flood through the action of striking the Nile. In contrast to the book of Exodus where Moses appears as a divine emissary tasked with bringing about the plagues with the help of Aaron, in Artapanus’ writings, Moses is the initiator of the flood. And not just any flood, but the very first flooding of the Nile:

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\text{προελθόντα δὲ µικρὸν τὸν Νεῖλον τῇ ράβδῳ πατάξαι, τὸν δὲ ποταµὸν πολύχουν γενόµενον κατακλῦσαι δὴν τὴν Αἴγυπτον. ἀπὸ τότε δὲ καὶ τὴν κατάβασιν αὐτοῦ γίνεσθαι. σοναγαγὸν δὲ τὸ ὕδωρ ἐποζέσαι καὶ τὰ ποτάµια διαφθεῖραι ξύα τοὺς τε λαοὺς διὰ τὴν δίψαν φθείρεσθαι.}
\]

Proceeding a little he [Moses] struck the Nile with the rod. The river became flooded and deluged all Egypt. From that time also its “inundation” takes place. The water became stagnant and stank and destroyed the creatures that live in rivers and the people perished from thirst.\(^{79}\) (Praep. Ev. 9.27.28)

The beginning of this verse follows a similar pattern that we see in the LXX’s version of the first plague with a few differences. In LXX Exodus, Aaron strikes the Nile to initiate the flood, whereby in Artapanus it is Moses who performs the action (cf. Exod 7:20).\(^{80}\) The result of the

\[^{76}\text{The connections between Moses and Orpheus also appear in Pseudo-Orpheus. In these writings, Moses is the student of Orpheus (and also his son). See Holladay, \textit{Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors. Volume IV}. In particular, references include: Ps.-Justin, \textit{Cohortatio ad Graecos} 15; Ps. Justin, \textit{De Monarchia} 2; Clement, \textit{Protrepticus} 7.74.2b–6, Clement, \textit{Stromateis} 5.12.78.3–5, 5.14.122.2–126.5; Eusebius, \textit{Praep. Ev.} 13.12.4b–5; Cyril of Alexandria, \textit{Contra Iulianum} 1.35; Theosophia Tubingensis.}\]

\[^{77}\text{See Collins, “Artapanus,” 889–903. Moses is likened to Mousaeus (teacher of Orpheus) (\textit{Praep. Ev.} 3.27.4; cf. \textit{Diod. Sic.} 1.94.4), Sesostri (\textit{Praep. Ev.} 3.27.4; see also \textit{Diod. Sic.} 1.94.4), and Hermes (the equivalent of Thoth the lawgiver) (\textit{Praep. Ev.} 3.27.9). See also the discussion on the relationship between Moses and Isis in Flusser and Amorai-Stark, “The Goddess Thermutis, Moses, and Artapanus,” 217–33.}\]

\[^{78}\text{A case could be made based on his associations with deities (see previous note) and the ways in which he is contrasted to Isis (\textit{Praep. Ev.} 3.27.3, 31–32).}\]

\[^{79}\text{For an alternative translation see Holladay, \textit{Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors. Volume I}, 221.}\]

\[^{80}\text{Power of striking water to make it do what you want: see also Artapanus in \textit{Praep. Ev.} 3.27.28; Exod 7:20; Lucan, \textit{Ph.}, X 215. The more active role of Moses can also be found in Josephus’s \textit{Antiquities} (René Bloch, \textquoteleft Moïse chez Flavius Josèphe: un exemple Juif du literature héroïque,” in \textit{Interprétations de Moïse. Égypte, Judée, Grèce et}
striking, according to Artapanus is that the “river became flooded and deluged all Egypt” (28), resulting in stagnant and stinky water that kills the animals in the river and the people. By contrast, in the LXX, the action of the striking results in the Nile and several other bodies of water turning to blood (thereby made “stinky”). Rather than a flood, in LXX Exodus we see the transformation of all bodies of water into blood.

For Artapanus, the floodwater that Moses’ action initiates is not the flowing, life-giving water, but instead it is stagnant and foul. In a sense, it is more reminiscent of Egyptian descriptions of the Nile River in May, when the water level was low and more stagnant, allowing for the quick spread of disease (e.g. malaria). This negative event, Artapanus tells us, continues to plague Egypt until Moses agrees to Pharaoh’s terms (that Pharaoh will release the Jews after one month if Moses restores the river) and draws in the stream again by striking the water. Moses here “releases” the water with his rod, drawing in the stream. Thus, he reverses the bad flood that he initiates.

A closer examination of Moses’ association with this bad flood reveals some underlying questions. According to Susanne Bickel, the ancient Egyptians always described the flood as beneficent and never negatively. While destructive floods certainly occurred, she claims that the Egyptians always held the Nile in such honour that even a devastating flood (too high or too low) was never described in negative terms. Yet, here the first flood is associated with negative results. Why then would Artapanus desire to associate Moses with it?

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81 Exod 7:20: “And Moyses and Aaron did so just as the Lord commanded them, and Aaron lifted it up and with his rod struck the water that was in the river before Pharaoh and before his attendants, and all the water in the river turned into blood.”


It is my assertion that there are in fact two descriptions of the Nile flood here. First, we have the claim that Moses deluged Egypt with stagnant stinky water (τὸν δὲ ποταμὸν πολύχουν γενόμενον κατακλύζειν δλην τὴν Αἴγυπτον). The destructive water is similar to the account in LXX Exodus, although the blood is not mentioned. In this account, Moses brings about a flood that results in negative consequences. In some ways, it is like the vengeful flood motif found in Greek literature, even though the nature of the destruction is different.  

Whereas the Egyptians saw the flood as entirely beneficent, for the Greeks, a bad flood was interpreted as punishment from the gods. Thus, Artapanus here is linking LXX Exodus with Greek ideas about the vengeful flood (brought about by the wrath of a deity).

A second description of the flood appears in this same verse (v. 28). The phrase “From that time also its ‘inundation’ takes place” (ἀπὸ τότε δὲ καὶ τὴν κατάβασιν αὐτοῦ γίνεσθαι) claims that Moses was associated with the first flood of Egypt. Thus, in this view Moses is the initiator of the flood just as Thoth, Ptah, or Amon are associated with the bringing of the flood. By associating Moses with the first flood, Artapanus demonstrates Moses’ control over water and singlehandedly makes him responsible for the agricultural wealth of the land of Egypt. Thus, here we have an attribution of the good parts of the flood to Moses.

The association between the Nile flood and Moses serves two purposes in the text as preserved by Eusebius. First, it elevates the status of Moses. As a semi-divine hero of the Jews, Moses is responsible for the agriculturally plentiful Egypt through his role as flood initiator. This further provides a history on the Jewish presence in Egypt, a history that is not fraught with tension but it ultimately beneficent for everyone in Egypt. Since the Jews played such a significant role in the organization and agricultural life of Egypt, it is only reasonable to conclude that they belonged in Egypt.

By conflating different cultural ideas of the Nile and reversing some of the traditional views of the Nile flood, Artapanus reveals his familiarity with Jewish, Egyptian, and Greek traditions. Building on these views, he creates his own theory of the origins of the annual

84 For a description of the vindictive flood idea in Greek literature see page 148 in this study.
85 Bonneau, Crue, 232–42.
inundation, by the hand of Moses, which is in line with his reading of the Exodus narrative and supports the cultural and social location of Jews in Ptolemaic Egypt.

4.4.2 The Eternal Spring of the River: The Wisdom of Solomon

As an Alexandrian Jew living under the Ptolemies, the author was concerned with understanding Jewish traditions and values through the lens of Greek philosophy, while highlighting the differences between the Jews and the Egyptians. Near the end of the composition, the author retells the Exodus narrative, offering a comparison between the plight of the Egyptians and the Jews. In chapter 11, we see a contrast drawn between the first Exodus plague (transformation of water into blood) and the water from the rock event (Exod 17; Num 20). It explains, on the one hand, the Jews thirsting for water and receiving it, and by contrast, the Egyptians being punished by water. Water here serves as an instrument for divine blessing or punishment:

4. ἔδίψησαν καὶ ἐπεκαλέσαντό σε,
καὶ ἔδόθη αὐτοῖς ἐκ πέτρας ἄκροτόμου ὦδωρ
καὶ ἱαμά δίψης ἐκ λίθου σκληροῦ.
5. δι’ ὧν γὰρ ἐκολάσθησαν οἱ ἐχθροὶ αὐτῶν,
διὰ τούτων αὐτοὶ ἀποροῦντες εὐεργετήθησαν.
6. ἀντὶ μὲν πηγῆς ἀνέδωκας ἀχρέος
ἀματι λυθρῶδει ταραχθέντος
7. εἰς ἔλεγχο νηπισκτόνος διατάγατος
ἐδώκας αὐτοῖς δαψιλὲς ὦδωρ
πῶς τοὺς ὑπεναντίους ἐκόλασας.
8. δείξας διὰ τοῦ τότε δίψους

4. They thirsted and called upon you,
and water was given them out of flinty rock,
and a remedy for their thirst out of hard stone.
5. For through the very things by which their enemies were punished,
you unexpectedly gave them abundant water,
6. Instead of the perennial spring of a river,
stirred up with defiled blood
7. in rebuke for the decree to kill the infants,
you unexpectedly gave them abundant water,
8. having shown by their thirst that at that time
how you punished their opponents. (Wis 11.4–8)
The event involving the rock draws directly from Exodus 17 and Numbers 20. In both these accounts, the people cry out due to thirst, and Moses is instructed to strike (Exod 17) or speak to (Num 20) the rock and it will “give forth its waters” (Num 20:8). In the account in Numbers, Moses strikes the rock twice (instead of speaking to the rock), and while water does emerge, Moses is punished for not obeying God’s specific instructions. In Exodus, the narrative lacks the disobedience portion preserved in Numbers explaining instead that Moses did as he was instructed and water came forth from the rock.

_Wisdom_ describes the water in the desert as a source of blessing for the Israelites (11.4, 7). This is contrasted with the bloody water of the river that is given to the Egyptians as punishment for killing the Hebrew babies (cf. Exod 1:22). The punishment involves the transformation of the “perennial spring of a river” (πηγῆς ἀενάου ποταμοῦ 11.6) to a river of blood. Therefore, the divine uses the river to punish the Egyptians, whereby a different form of water, from a rock, is used to bless the Israelites.

A number of parallels can be seen here in the idea of water coming out of a rock and the origin of the floodwaters. First, both describe water as coming from below. For the Egyptians, the floodwater comes from a subterranean origin. Similarly in _Wisdom_ 11 the water comes from below. Second, not only does water come from below, it emerges from a rock. In Egyptian Pyramid Texts it is common to find descriptions of the Nile flood coming forth from rocks or caverns (often likened to the area of the cataracts at Aswan). _Wisdom_ here explains the

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86 Exod 17; Num 20; Deut 8:15.
87 For examples: Pyr 765; “Hymn to Aten” in Budge, _From Fetish to God_, 414; and for later Greek representations see the _Hiero_.12 in George Boas, _The Hieroglyphics of Horapollo_ (New York: Pantheon Books, 1950).
88 In Gen 2:6 we have a similar idea of water coming from below the earth to water the land. This idea has parallels in other Ancient Near Eastern cosmologies. Similar notions of underground springs can be found in Akkadian whereby the Hebrew word ʿark is equivalent to the Akkadian id that refers to sweet water below the earth (William F. Albright, “The Babylonian Matter in the Predeuteronomic Primeval History (JE) in Gen 1–11,” _JBL_ 58 [1939], 102–103). The Sumerian primeval myths “Enki and Ninhursag, a Paradise Myth” contain a similar image to that of Genesis whereby waters are issued from the ground (Claus Westermann, _Gensis 1–11: A Commentary_ [trans. John J. Scullion S. J.; Minn: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984], 200–201). See also Gerhard Von Rad, _Genesis: A Commentary_ (trans. John H. Marks; London: SCM Press, 1963), 74–75. Another interesting verse found in the Hebrew Bible is Deut 11:10–11. Here the land of Egypt is looked down upon as they have to irrigate their crops whereby the Israelites looked to their divine as the bringer of rain.
water coming “out of flinty rock.” Third, the idea of gushing forth or a sudden increase of water is also reminiscent of the flood, whereby the waters presumably burst forth suddenly in June. This was a celebrated and greatly anticipated period for the inhabitants of Egypt. An example of the celebration can be seen in P. Oxy IX 1211 that lists different articles that were sacrificed to the Nile in the month of June. Such practices were thought to ensure a bountiful crop in the upcoming flood cycle. When we look at the account of the gushing water from the rock in Exodus and Numbers we see that the people were satisfied and pleased, in a similar way that anyone, even the Egyptians, would have welcomed water during a time of thirst.

While it is not my claim that the event described in Exodus/Numbers (and Wisdom) was directly shaped by Egyptian ideas about the Nile flood, it is interesting to note the similarities that appear which indicate similar ideas about water and the potential sources of water. It reflects a common understanding of the ways in which water appears and where it can be found.

A closer examination into the description of the river in Wis 11.6 illuminates the influence of Egyptian (and possibly later Greek developments) of the subterranean theory of the flood origins. As mentioned above, the Egyptians developed the view that the Nile floodwater came from an underground source. While certainly the main interest of the text is to demonstrate how the Egyptians are punished by the same means that the Israelites are delivered, this small reference betrays a familiarity with theories of the day. Moreover, this theory is picked up and further developed in Greek texts. According to Danielle Bonneau, this theory originated in ancient Egypt, and continued to be a popular view into the Roman period. Looking closely at Wis 11.6, we see two ideas put forward. First is the idea of a “spring” or “source” being connected to the Nile. Spring (πηγῆς) is a common term used in the ancient world to refer to any underground source of water. While it is possible that this was actually a reference to the riverine beginnings, I think it is far more plausible to see a connection to the specific view of the Nile flood as originating from an underground source. The second idea is the “perennial” or “eternal” (ἀενάου) nature of the river. In describing the Nile in this way, the author shows his familiarity with the regular Nile flow (it does not dry up like some bodies of water, such as a wadi) and with

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89 P. Oxy IX 1211.
the perennial flood cycle. Therefore πηγῆς ἀενάου ποταμοῦ describes the Nile’s eternal or ever present nature as originating from some underground locale.

The control of natural events is firmly set in the hands of God, and the righteous and the unrighteous receive their rewards and punishments through the same medium, water. Just as Artapanus describes the control of water as a tool used to punish the Egyptians, the Wisdom of Solomon explains the positive feature of the flood (its eternal nature) and that even this can be used as a tool to punish those who do not follow God. Even though the Wisdom of Solomon describes the Egyptians negatively, the text does seem to adopt the theory of the flood that was originally Egyptian. Moreover, the author does not portray the descriptions of the land of Egypt negatively, but more of a matter of fact phenomenon. To put it differently, from the perspective of the Wisdom of Solomon, the Egyptians were bad, but the land of Egypt (and the Nile in particular) was good.

4.4.3 The Etesian Winds of Egypt and the Impious Egyptians – Philo’s Life of Moses

In Life of Moses, Philo interprets the Exodus narrative from an allegorical and philosophical perspective. While Moses is the focus of his account, as a model of virtue par excellence, he also emphasizes the distinctions between the Jews (‘Hebrews’ in his account) and the Egyptians in terms of their beliefs. Embedded in his narrative, Philo argues that the Etesian winds are the source of the floodwaters, yet he also explains that negative floods occur due to the impiety of the Egyptians.⁹⁰ I will detail these explanations below.

First, set in the context of his discussion on the plagues, he explains that the Etesian winds, which blow annually from the north to the south in July and August, are the cause for the annual Nile flood. Philo explains that the winds blow against the mouths of the Nile, which prevents the floodwaters “flowing freely into the sea” (Mos., 1.115). He further explains that these winds are

⁹⁰ The Etesian (ἐτησίαι) winds are also known as periodic winds blowing northwest in the summer. The term is used by a number of Greek and Roman authors such as Aristides, Diodorus Sicilus, Hippocrates, Plutarch, and Strabo. For a list of word frequencies in Greek and Roman texts see: http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/wordfreq?lang=greek&lookup=e%29thsi%2Fai.
the reason why the water is raised to a considerable height and is often “agitated within the country.” The same theory can be found in the writings of Herodotus, although he dismisses it as incorrect. Nevertheless, it is clear here that Philo is picking up on this idea but transforming the theory to fit in his own text.91

The Etesian wind theory originally developed in Egypt, although it is unclear how far back these traditions go.92 The winds were associated with the goddess Isis, and were considered to bring life. The southern winds, which came later in the year, were associated with Seth, the enemy of Isis and her husband Osiris. These southern winds were thought to bring death. Thus, just as the rise and fall of the Nile was understood in terms of the battle between good and evil with the rise being good and the fall being evil, we see that a similar idea of the winds was at play.

The Greeks also advanced the Etesian wind theory.93 They attributed its origins to the Greek philosopher Thales of Miletus. While many popular Greek writers, such as Herodotus, Aristotle, and Diodorus Siculus mention this theory, they are quick to refute its viability. For Herodotus, there are two reasons for why this cannot be accurate. First, the Nile rises even when the winds are not blowing, for example, the month of June. Second, other floods that flow south to north in places such as Syria or Libya do not experience the same phenomenon. Therefore, the winds could not be the reason for the flood according to Herodotus.

What is noteworthy when looking at Philo’s description is that he does not spend a lot of time discussing the theory. Whereas other Greek writers discussing the flood would spend pages upon pages discussing their own views while refuting others, Philo mentions the theory in passing, and does not expand or dwell further on it, which probably reflects that his interests lie

91 Sly, Philo, 19–21: “Philo had used his knowledge of the Etesian winds to explain why the Nile acted differently from all other rivers” (21).
92 Bonneau, Crue, 151–59.
more in the narrative than in the ways in which the theory maps on to the story. This is one way that Philo’s account differs from other Greek sources.

Near the beginning of the *Life of Moses*, Philo explains that every year the flood produces an unlimited abundance of produce, unless the anger of God interrupts this balance:

For the river of this country, in the height of summer, when other streams, whether winter torrents or spring-fed, are said to dwindle, rises and overflows, its flood makes a lake of the fields which need no rain but every year bear a plentiful crop of good produce of every kind, if not prevented by some visitation of the wrath of God to punish the prevailing impiety of the inhabitants. (*Mos.*, 1.6)

The impiety of the Egyptians is presented as the reason for a negative flood, which would be a flood that is either too high or too low. This view of a flood that punishes (vengeful flood) was also seen earlier in Artapanus.⁹⁴ The punishment of the plagues, Philo explains, is rightfully placed on the Egyptians, because they refuse to believe in God (a lack of piety) and their worship of the Nile. Elsewhere Philo explains that the first plagues involved water because the Egyptians honoured water too much.⁹⁵

Philo is reacting in his writings against the Nile cult worship that honours water to a special degree, perhaps even as a deity itself. Pearce argues that for Philo, this devotion to the Nile is identified with Egyptian impiety and atheism.⁹⁶ Atheism, for Philo, is the fundamental failure to understand God, and is connected to their lack of piety. Therefore, the Egyptians were punished largely because of their failure to worship God in the appropriate manner, and

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⁹⁴ *Praep. Ev.* 9.27.28.
⁹⁵ See for example *Mos.*, 1.98.
⁹⁶ Pearce, “Philo on the Nile,” 139.
moreover, they were punished by the very medium through which they expressed their lack of piety (the Nile).

The negative view of the Nile cult is a distinctive view of Egyptian religion not found in Greek literature. The Greeks had a habit of ascribing deities to specific rivers and bodies of water, yet, for Philo, it was necessary to show that all water was under the control of his god alone. This is emphasized when Philo sets up the narrative of the crossing of the Sea of Reeds. He explains that Moses was given power over the elements from God because Moses did not desire the gain and riches available to men of high repute (which he was) (1.155–156). Moses’ control of the elements is only because it was awarded to him from God, and thus when he strikes the water in the Sea of Reeds, the waters move to create a pathway for the Hebrews to cross safely. Thus, Moses is given the power over the elements due to his virtue, not because he was a god himself.

Despite the many negative views of Egypt and the Egyptians in Philo’s account, he does offer a positive view of the Nile River and the flood. He describes the natural state of the Nile water as vivifying, wholesome, pristine, and clear (1.100–101). The well-known properties of water, upon which Philo certainly would have relied, were positive, even if they were found in a place that was full of people who were backwards and opposite, namely, the Egyptians. Similarly, Philo compares the Nile to other rivers, emphasizing its difference (Mos., 1.6, see text above). Here he betrays here his understanding the Nile, its annual cycle, and its importance to the land of Egypt. Rather than describing the river as backwards, here he describes it in a more matter of fact way. While Philo mentions the Nile in several other writings, in Life of Moses it is most clearly laid out in terms of the popular beliefs of the source of the river, cause of the flood, and its benefits to the land of Egypt. It is here that we see the combination of popular Greek literary motifs and his experiences with the environment.

Moreover, Philo is aware of the different views of the Nile and the flood. He points to Ethiopia as the riverine origins of the river (1.99; 1.115), he understands the different seasons of Egypt (1.114–115), and explains the productivity of the crops as a result of the inundation (1.6; 1.115). These rather mundane explanations of the environment of Egypt demonstrate Philo’s awareness of the land and the importance that the Nile played in the lives of the inhabitants of
Egypt. What is significant about his awareness is that he uses it to help explain the Exodus events to his audience of diaspora Jews.

To summarize, it seems that Philo was aware of at least two Greek ideas about the flood. The first is the adoption of the Etesian wind theory, which Philo mentions only in passing. He neither expands upon it, nor engages different theories like many Greek sources do. The second is the view of the flood as vindictive. A negative flood was the result of the impiety of the Egyptians, which stemmed from their worship of the floodwaters, rather than the source of the Nile’s power that for Philo was God. These two views of the inundation show how Philo was aware of Greek perspectives on the causes of the flood, but that he ultimately wove them into his narrative as he saw fit. Rather than get into a long explanation as to why the Etesian winds caused the flood, he focuses more on the punishments of the Egyptians that took place by the power of God because the Egyptians were unwilling to acknowledge the true source of the flood, the power of God.

4.5 Conclusion

The three Jewish exodus narratives composed in Egypt demonstrate how Jewish authors built upon popular ideas about the flood and used them as inspiration for their own ideas about the Nile’s inundation. Focusing on these new Jewish conceptions opens up a window into the life of the Jews of Egypt, a life that was influenced not only by the political, social, and cultural contexts of the period, but perhaps most significantly, the physical environment of Egypt.

The perspectives of Artapanus, *Wisdom of Solomon*, and Philo each share some similarities with Greek and Egyptian ideas, but ultimately show that Jews developed their own conceptions of their surroundings gleaned through both their personal experiences living in the land of Egypt and from their interactions with Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans. For Artapanus, it was important to demonstrate the power of Moses and his role in initiating the inundation. This helped to explain the migration and settlements of the Jews in the place where the Deuteronomist

97 Pearce, *The Land of the Body*.
told them to never return (Deut 17:16). Despite the extremely negative attitude towards the Egyptians in the *Wisdom of Solomon*, the author shows familiarity with the Egyptian view of the origins of the Nile from a subterranean source. This view, while also adopted and propagated by the Greeks, is not described in *Wisdom* negatively, but as a matter of fact natural phenomenon. For Philo, the Nile was caused by the Etesian winds. Usually, the flood produced an “unlimited abundance” of produce, however, some years there were destructive (or vindictive) floods due to the “excessive impiety” of the Egyptians (*Mos.*, 1.6). Philo’s account engages with these two Greek ideas about the flood in the context of his Exodus narrative. He does not offer a lengthy explanation as to why he adopts these ideas, but uses them as a way to show the power of the Hebrew God over that of the Egyptians.

This chapter has focused on the different conceptions of the flood developed in Exodus narratives composed in Egypt. The Nile was certainly a concern for the Jews of Egypt. As was shown in chapter one of this study, the Jews lived throughout Egypt, but always in close proximity to the Nile or one of its tributaries. Thus it is unsurprising that Jewish writings in particular would find ways to incorporate this critical annual event into their texts and why it was less important (or not at all) for Jewish writers living outside of Egypt to include the flood at all. Therefore this chapter has shown the diversity of Jewish ideas in Egypt and how the Jews not only lived in the physical environment of Egypt, but within a socio-cultural one as well.

Both chapters three and four have focused primarily on the Nile in their investigations into how the Jewish Exodus narratives reflect the environment of Egypt. While the Nile dominates the hydric landscape of Egypt, it was not the only source of water. This next chapter will explore the terminology used to refer to bodies of water in the Exodus narratives. It will show that these authors were not only reading the LXX while composing their texts but that they were also shaped through their experiences with their physical settings.
Chapter 5

5 Adopting the Language of the Environment of Egypt

5.1 Introduction

A close reading of the exodus narratives composed in Egypt reveals that the language used to identify and describe the aquatic landscape was not standardized. Often different terms and adjectives were employed when referring to the Nile, the Sea of Reeds, or canals. The differences in terminology are further amplified when we compare the literary texts from Egypt with LXX Exodus. While each of the exodus texts from Egypt shows familiarity with LXX Exodus, there remain several significant departures from the LXX in terms of their descriptions of the land of Egypt as presented in the context of the exodus story. The aim of this chapter is to provide a detailed analysis of the language used in the exodus texts from Egypt by reading them in the context of Egyptian hydrology in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. In this way, I will show that the terminology used in these texts developed primarily out of the experiences of Jewish writers from living in the land of Egypt. Jewish authors drew upon their knowledge of their environment to construct a narrative that was grounded in the physical realities of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt.

5.2 Hydric Terminology in the Exodus Narratives

In this section, I will catalogue the various references to the physical environment of Egypt as found in Artapanus’ On the Jews, Ezekiel the Tragedian’s Exagoge, the Wisdom of Solomon, and Philo’s Life of Moses. I begin with an analysis of the Nile river, which is mentioned in the context of the plague accounts. I will look at the different names of the river and how it was described. Next, I will turn to canals and other bodies of water. These primarily appear in the account of the first plague, when different bodies of water turned into blood. The final section will look at the descriptions of the Sea of Reeds when the Israelites were exiting the land of Egypt. Overall, hydric terminology is found throughout the exodus account making it a prime story to focus on in this study.
### 5.2.1 The Nile River

#### 5.2.1.1 Naming the Nile

For the ancient Egyptians, the Nile was simply called *Iteru*, meaning river. The flood, by contrast, was referred to as Hapi, a divinization of the flood. While the Nile was sacred to the Egyptians, the Nile flood was even more special and identified with nearly every Egyptian deity at some point or another. The Greeks referred to the Nile as *Neilos* (*Νεῖλος*), as early as the writings of Hesiod in the eighth century BCE. *Neilos* was considered the deity of the river and was associated with abundance of produce, a trait that grew in popularity into the Roman period.

In the Hebrew Bible, five different names are used to refer to the Nile. The primary term is *Ye’or*, which is mentioned sixty-four times and is usually translated as “Nile” or watercourse. Other terms include *nachal Mizraim*, mentioned seven times, translated as “wadi of Egypt” and *Shihôr*, which is mentioned five times, usually referring to a more specific location. Two other words occur only once in the Hebrew Bible in Gen 15:18, *nahar Mizraim* meaning “river of Egypt,” which also appears in the Genesis Apocryphon. Also, *yam Mizraim* in Isa 11:15, translated as “sea of Egypt.” There remains debate as to whether all of these terms actually refer to the Nile proper or if they refer to different watercourses or canals in Egypt.

Despite the plurality of terminology found in the Hebrew Bible, the LXX does not use such diverse language, preferring instead to use the term *potamos* (*ποταμός*), the generic Greek term for river. The popular Greek term *Neilos* does not appear anywhere in the LXX, yet it does appear in several Jewish texts from Egypt. For example, Philo uses the term *Neilos* four times,

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2. *Ye’or* is the term used throughout the book of Exodus to refer to the Nile.
3. In the LXX, it is translated in four different ways: brook (*χειμάρρος*: Josh 15:47; 2 Kings 24:7; 2 Chr 7:8), valley (*φάραγξ*: Josh 15:4), river (*ποταμός*: 1 Kgs 8:65), and Rinokoroura (*Ῥινοκοροῦρα*: Isa 27:12) that may have been a reference to the town in Northern Sinai (TM 2052).
4. The term is confusing as it is translated in the LXX in five different ways (never the same way twice). Whether it actually refers to the Nile is debated. References include: Josh 3:5 (desert), 19:26 (Zion); Isa 23:3 (merchant); Jer 2:18 (Gihon); and 1 Chr 13:5 (border).
5. For a translation of the text see page 118 in this study.
Artapanus twice, and the Sibylline Oracles at least four times throughout Books 5 and 11. The adoption of the word *Neilos* into the vocabulary of Jewish writers demonstrates the influence of Greek culture and religion on Jewish writings in the Hellenistic and Roman period.⁶

In the exodus narratives from Egypt, the Nile is almost always called *potamos*. There are only a few exceptions in these texts where the Nile is referred to as *Neilos*. First, in the writings of Artapanus, Moses learns about the plot to kill him so he sails across the Nile (τὸν Νεῖλον) from Memphis to depart to Arabia (9.27.17). In another example, Artapanus in his description of the first plague mentions the Nile (9.27.28): “Proceeding a little [Moses] struck the Nile with the rod” (προελθόντα δὲ μικρὸν τὸν Νεῖλον τῇ ῥάβδῳ πατάξαι).⁷ Second, Philo uses the term *Neilos* four times in his writings,⁸ but only twice in the *Life of Moses*. In his description of the Nile’s flood cycle, the word *Neilos* is used to refer to the branches of the Nile in the Delta region (*Mos.*, 1.115 “mouths of the Nile” [τῶν τοῦ Νείλου στοµάτων]).⁹ Another reference appears in *Life of Moses* book II where Philo discusses how the Egyptians make a god out of the name for the Nile (θεοπλαστοῦσι τῷ λόγῳ τὸν Νεῖλον Αἰγύπτιοι).¹⁰ Apart from these examples of *Neilos* in Artapanus and Philo’s *Life of Moses*, the Nile is referred to as the generic *potamos* in the exodus narratives.¹¹

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⁶ Moreover, since the Greeks considered *Neilos* to be a God of the Nile the use of this term may also show a familiarity with the association of bodies of water with deities. This can also be seen in the Egyptian traditions of associating the god Hapi and Osiris with the Nile and its flood in addition to the Greek god *Neilos*. For an in-depth look, see Bonneau, *Crue*; and Wild, *Water in the Cultic Worship of Isis and Sarapis*.

⁷ It is important to note that there are challenges with these references found in Artapanus insofar as they are available only from a third hand source. Since Eusebius is copying Polyhistor who is summarizing Artapanus, we really do not know if Artapanus originally used this term.

⁸ The other two places are *Flight*. 180 and *Prov*. 2.65.

⁹ Cf. 1QapGen ar XIX, 10–13.

¹⁰ *Mos.*, 2.195.

¹¹ The *Wisdom of Solomon* and Ezekiel the Tragedian’s *Exagoge* both refer to the Nile as *potamos*. 
5.2.1.2 Descriptions of the Nile

In addition to the adoption of a new name for the river, Jewish texts from Hellenistic and Roman Egypt also differ in their descriptions of the Nile from other texts. In the book of Exodus little information is given about the Nile except that it is the place where Moses was rescued as a child. It is also where several plagues occurred, such as the transformation of the river into blood causing it to stink (ἐποζέσει) (LXX Exod 7:18). Other references to the river include statements about events happening on its shore (Gen 41:3; Exod 7:15). Further details appear outside of the book of Exodus. In the prophetic books, specifically Amos and Jeremiah, we have descriptions of the rising and the falling of the river (Amos 8:8; 9:5; Jer 26:7–10), a clear explanation of the flood. What is common about all references to the river in the Hebrew Bible is the acknowledgement of the importance of the Nile to life in Egypt (Jer 26:8; Isa 11:5).

Jewish exodus narratives composed outside of Egypt similarly offer few descriptions of the Nile. Jubilees, for example, mentions only that Moses was placed on the banks of the river (Jub. 47.4). The river is not mentioned in connection with the plagues (cf. Jub. 48). In Ps.-Philo’s LAB the river is absent in his recounting of the events in Egypt (LAB 10). Yet, in stark contrast to these examples, Josephus offers a detailed account of the exodus. He explains that during the first plague the river water could not be drunk and that those who tried to drink it experienced great pains (Ant. 2.293–295), although for the Hebrews it remains “sweet and fit for drinking” (2.295: γλυκύς καὶ πότιµος). His narrative is the only one in which we learn about the nature of the Nile River from a Jewish source composed outside of Egypt.12

By contrast to the sparse details in the LXX and in other exodus narratives from outside of Egypt, Jewish authors writing in Egypt use a number of new adjectives to describe the Nile. Ezekiel calls the river deep (βαθύρρον), its marshes are thick (ἕλος δασύ; cf. Philo, Mos., 1.10) and the shore of the river is soggy (ὑγρᾶς ποταμίας).13 In the Wisdom of Solomon, the river comes

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12 Certainly those living and writing in Egypt were not the only ones to know about the Nile and its flood. Josephus was well read and travelled, so it is not surprising that, considering his large body of work, he would provide a very detailed accounting of the Nile.

13 Exagoge 13, 17, 31 respectively.
from a perennial spring (πηγῆς ἀενάου) (11.6) and in the descriptions of the plagues, the river is said to have “vomited up a mass of frogs” (ἐξηρεύξατο ὁ ποταμὸς πλῆθος βατράχων) (19.10).14

In Philo’s Life of Moses we find the most elaborate descriptions of the Nile. Book one, in particular, contrasts the Nile in its normal state against the river during the first plague whereby the water turned to blood:

100. ἐναπέθνησε δὲ καὶ τὰ γένη τῶν ἰχθύων ἀπαντα, ἀτε τῆς ζωτικῆς δυνάμεως εἰς φθοροποίον μεταβαλούσης, ώς δυσωδίας πάντα δια πάντων ἀναπεπλήσθαι, τοσοῦτων σηπομένων ἀθρόον σωμάτων· πολύς δὲ καὶ ἀνθρώπων ὁ χλοθῶς ὑπὸ δίψους διαφθαρείς ἔχειτο σωρηδὸν ἐπὶ τῶν τριόδων, οὐ σθενόντων ἐπὶ τὰ μνήματα τῶν οἰκείων τοὺς τετελευτηκότας ἐκκρηκτείν. 101. ἐπὶ γὰρ ἡμέρας ἑπτὰ τὸ δεινὸν ἐκράτησεν, ἕως οἱ Ἕλληνες τὸν Μωυσῆν, οὗτοι δὲ τὸν θεὸν ἱκέτευσαν, ὡς οἱ μὲν Ἀιγύπτιοι τοὺς ἀμφί Μωυσήν, οὕτως δὲ τὸν θεὸν ἱκέτευσαν, ὥστε τὰς ἡμέρας ἑπτὰ τὸ δεινὸν ἐκράτησεν. 100. Every kind of fish died there, since its life-giving properties had become a means of destruction, so that a general stench pervaded everything from all these bodies rotting together. Also a great multitude of men, killed by thirst, lay in heaps at the cross-roads, since their relatives had not the strength to carry the dead to the tombs. 101. For seven days the terror reigned, until the Egyptians besought Moses and his brother, and they besought God, to take pity on the perishing. And he whose nature is to show mercy changed the blood into water fit for drinking, and restored to the river its old health-giving flood free from impurity. (Mos., 1.100–101).15

The river’s natural state, according to Philo, is vivifying, wholesome, and clear. During the plagues, it was transformed into a destructive power (φθοροποίον), and was associated with death and sickness. The positive benefits of the Nile in its natural state are similar to descriptions found in Greek literature. The Greeks believed that the Nile’s water contained special properties causing healing, rapid growth, weight gain, increased offspring, ease of pregnancy, and nourishment to the body.16 The value placed on the Nile and in particular its floodwaters by the

14 Note that similar terminology appears in Exod 7:28.
15 Italics are mine. I have made a few changes to the translation of Colson.
16 Wild, Water in the Cultic Worship of Isis and Sarapis, 89–97.
Greeks mirrors the honour given to it by the Egyptians. Consider, for example, how Plutarch describes how the Egyptians viewed the Nile, which highlights not only Egyptian, but Greek and Roman ideas as well. According to Plutarch, the god Osiris is not only the floodwater, but also the ocean and the principle of moisture. In chapter thirty-six, Plutarch describes how Osiris is viewed:

οὐ μόνον δὲ τὸν Νεῖλον, ἀλλὰ πᾶν ύγρόν ἁπλῶς Ὄσιριδος ἀπορροήν καλοῦσι: καὶ τῶν ἱερῶν ἀεὶ προπομπεύει τὸ ὦδρεῖον ἐπί τιμὴ τοῦ θεοῦ. καὶ θρύω βασιλέα καὶ τὸ νότιον κλίμα τοῦ κόσμου γράφουσι, καὶ μεθερμηνεύεται τὸ θρύον ποτισμὸς; καὶ κύησις πάντων, καὶ δοκεῖ γεννητικῷ μορίῳ τὴν φύσιν ἐοικέναι.

They call not only the Nile but all moisture generally the efflux of Osiris, and in honour of the god the water-pitcher always leads the procession of the sacred ceremonies. They write the words for “king” and “the southern region of the world” by means of a rush; and the rush is interpreted as the irrigation and impregnation of all things and in form seems to be like the generative member.17 (Isis and Osiris, 36).

In this passage, Osiris is all water (both the Nile and the Nile flood) and is honoured by a water pitcher (ὑδρεῖον), which leads the processions in the ritual cult. In this way, he is comparable to Zeus, the god of rain.18 The honour given to the river water is similarly emphasized in Philo’s writing when he explains that the Egyptians honoured water too highly in his estimation. In fact, this honour was the reason for why the first plague had to do with water (Mos., 1.98). The use of water in ritual ceremonies is similarly attested in the Roman period, where festivals were coordinated with the flood cycle and involved the river in its rituals (see P. Oxy 1211 and P. Oxy 2782). Philo’s descriptions are therefore in line with such positive views described in the non-Jewish sources about the importance of the river to the inhabitants of Egypt.

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18 Bonneau, Crue, 316–19.
Whereas much of the exodus narrative in the *Wisdom of Solomon* deals with the transformation of the natural world more generally,\(^\text{19}\) the river is invoked in two particular cases in the context of the exodus story.\(^\text{20}\) The first appears in 11.6 where we are told that the river originates from an eternal underground spring (πηγῆς ἀεινάου ποταμοῦ).\(^\text{21}\) The second occurrence of the word *potamos* appears in *Wisdom* 19.10. Here in the second plague narrative, the river “vomitted up a mass of frogs” (ἐξηρεύξατο ὁ ποταμὸς πλῆθος βατράχων) (Wis 19.10). This passage recounts briefly several of the plagues and concludes with the gift of manna and quails while in the desert. This verse, however, gives us little details about the Nile except that it is a place where frogs reside.\(^\text{22}\)

The river is called *potamos* (not *Neilos*) four times in Ezekiel the Tragedian’s *Exagoge*. First, in line 13 we have the mention of the Hebrew boys being thrown into the river deep (βαθύρρον). Second, the river’s edge is the location where Moses was placed as an infant (line 17). Third, Moses was uncovered by Pharaoh’s daughter by the river’s soggy shore (ὑγρᾶς ποταμίας)\(^\text{23}\) (line 31). Finally, in the context of the first plague narrative, Ezekiel the Tragedian explains that the river will flow red with blood. The descriptions of the depths of the river and details of the shoreline of the Nile are not found in the LXX. In the book of Exodus what is mentioned is the edge of the river, first Moses’ parents place him by the river as an infant (Exod 2:3), and second, Moses meets Pharaoh by the river (Exod 7:15). Despite being significantly shorter than the book of Exodus, Ezekiel’s *Exagoge* gives us more of a glimpse into how the Nile was understood by Jews living in Ptolemaic Egypt by the inclusion of its descriptive terminology associated with the river.

\(^{19}\) For a discussion on the transformation of the elements see Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, 330–32. There is a debate as to whether the focus on the transformation of nature is drawing on the later developed formulation of *creatio ex nihilo*. Winston argues that he is not advocating this view (331), but others such as Ernest G. Clark believe he was specifically drawing on this Greek philosophical theory (*Commentary on Wisdom of Solomon* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973], 128). Either way, the author of *Wisdom* is here making a claim to some kind of new creation.

\(^{20}\) The plural form is invoked in 5:22 but it is not specific to the Nile River.

\(^{21}\) For a longer discussion on this see chapter four in this study.

\(^{22}\) Frogs were important symbols of regeneration in Egypt for the Egyptians and were associated with the god Hekat.

\(^{23}\) *Exagoge* 13, 17, 31.
The Nile in Artapanus’ *On the Jews* is called both *Neilos* and *potamos*. What is striking about the Nile in Artapanus is that it is placed under the control of Moses. He is the one who causes the river to turn foul, to flood, and then return to its original state (9.27.28–29). While the river is mentioned several times, there are few descriptions of the river. Instead the river does not actively play a role in the narrative, with the exception of Moses’ influence over it.

### 5.2.1.3 The Nile Flood

Thus far the focus of this section has been on the Nile broadly speaking. Yet, what specifically can we learn about its inundation? A cursory glance over early Jewish literature reveals how the texts from Egypt are once again far more explicit in describing the flood than their non-Egyptian counterparts. Consider, for example, that in the book of Exodus the flooding of the Nile is never mentioned. The only places that reference the flooding of the Nile in the Hebrew Bible are the prophetic books of Amos, Jeremiah, and Isaiah. In LXX Jer 26:7–8 the rising and the falling of the Nile river is mentioned in the context of predicting Egypt’s future destruction. The rising up and falling has several other parallels such as the descriptions found in Isaiah and Amos. Additionally, there is a popular metaphor of overflowing and flooding used throughout the Hebrew Bible and Ben Sira, used to refer to both good and bad things.

Artapanus and Philo both incorporate the flood into their exodus accounts. Artapanus refers to the river as “overflowed, flooded” (*πολύχουν*), and the inundation as *κατακλύζειν* and *κατάβασιν*. Philo describes the flooding of the Nile using many of the same descriptions that we find in other non-Jewish writings about the environment of Egypt. He describes the flood as

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24 Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors. Volume 1*, 241 n. 96.

25 A possible exception is the interpretation of the first plague of blood to have been an etiology for the initial flooding in June, whereby the Nile would change to a reddish hue due to the increase of sediments originating from the Ethiopian mountains. William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1999), 348.

it relates to weather patterns and the seasons. He also compares it with other rivers, emphasizing its unique nature. This view is similarly found in the writings of Herodotus (Hist., 2.19). In Histories, this uniqueness of the river explains the character of the Egyptian people (Hist., 2.35). According to Niehoff, Philo makes a similar claim to Herodotus, linking the people with the river, but instead of the neutral, even positive sense that Herodotus writes with, Philo judges them negatively. This negative understanding of the Egyptian people stems from Philo’s attitude towards their worship of the Nile, which he calls Egyptian atheism. This attack is a clear attempt by Philo to draw distinguishing lines between the Egyptians and the Jews. Here Philo’s particular agenda comes to bear on his descriptions of the environment of Egypt.

Neither Wisdom nor Exagoge are explicit in their descriptions of the Nile flood. Wisdom 11.6 could refer to the floodwaters (a topic explored later in this chapter as well as in chapter four). However, Ezekiel the Tragedian is silent on this particular manner. Nevertheless, both Artapanus and Philo are explicit in their understanding of the inundation cycle of the Nile river, which plays an important role in their narratives.

5.2.1.4 Summary of Nilotic Terminology

Thus far we have examined the different terms used to label and describe the Nile and its flood. The Nile river in the Jewish exodus narratives is most frequently referred to as potamos, but occasionally the word Neilos is used. The adoption of the generic term for river in Greek is significant insofar as the Hebrew Bible attests to a wider variety of names, although not in the...
book of Exodus proper. Moreover, the Nile is described in more detail in the exodus narratives from Egypt. Specifically we learn about the banks of the Nile, its origins, and the flood cycle. Comparatively, we have little information about the river in the book of Exodus and other non-Egyptian recountings. The river was central to life in Egypt. Philo even calls the river a life-giving power (τῆς ζωτικῆς δυνάμεως) (Mos., 1.100–101). It is therefore unsurprising that the Nile, as so central to the lives of the inhabitants of Egypt, was significant to Jewish inhabitants and as a result they incorporated more into their narratives.

The importance of the river is further exemplified by the settlement of Jews in cities and towns along the banks of the Nile: such as, Edfu, Thebes, and Memphis. This would have given them firsthand experience in interacting with the river and thus giving them an appreciation for the importance of the Nile for life in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt. Other sources mention that the Nile was a source of employment for Jews. One papyrus, C.Pap.Jud. III 469 from 89–90 CE, mentions a Jew involved in the transport of grain to Alexandria. The text documents that they used boats on the river in order to facilitate the trade. Moreover, the Jews in Schedia may have been involved in policing the Nile (Josephus, C. Ap., 2.64). Looking at the literary texts against this backdrop we see that the Jews would have experienced the Nile in a number of ways and thus it is not surprising to see them adopt the simplicity of the term potamos, the river, when referring to the Nile. For them, it was central to life in Egypt.

5.2.2 Canals and Other Bodies of Water

In addition to the Nile, other canals and bodies of water formed part of the fluvial landscape of Egypt. A large-scale example is the Bahr Yusef, a river that branched off from the Nile and ran parallel to the Nile from Upper Egypt to the oasis depression of the Fayum region.33 Additionally, at Cairo (ancient Memphis), the Nile split into several branches in the Delta region that all fed into the Mediterranean.34 From a local perspective, canals and channels were often

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33 See map of Egypt on page 38 in this study. The city of Oxyrhynchos was located along this branch of the river.

34 See map of Delta on page 49 in this study. Also for a discussion on branches see page 48 n. 86 on the different branches of the Nile.
dug in order to transport water from one field or area to another. These required cooperative and managerial techniques, and as such were often managed locally. Moving the Nile water, especially the floodwater, from one place to another was essential for life in Egypt. It was not only the Nile river that served the people, but the entire fluvial network of water sources that pepper the landscape of Egypt. We have several examples of Jews living on canals and rivers in Egypt. In Ptolemaic Arsinoe, for example, a *proseuche* was built beside the Argaitis canal (Ἀργαίτιδος διώρυξ) (*C.Pap.Jud.* I 134). Moreover, we know that Jews lived in places like Oxyrynchos (located along the Bahr Yusef), Thmuis (northeastern Delta), and Xenephyris (Canopic branch of the Nile), showing that the main Nile waterway that cuts through the land of Egypt was not the only water source in Egypt.

Canals and other fluvial bodies appear frequently in the accounts describing the first plague in the exodus narrative. According to the book of Exodus, not only did the Nile turn to blood, but several other bodies of water as well:

Now the Lord said to Moyses, “Say to Aaron, your brother, ‘Take your rod, and stretch out the hand over the waters of Egypt (ὕδατα Αἰγύπτου) and over their rivers (τοὺς ποταμοὺς) and over their canals (τὰς διώρυγας) and over their marshes (τὰ Ἑλη) and over all their accumulated water (πᾶν συνεστηκὸς ὕδωρ), and they shall be blood.’ “ And blood occurred in all the land of Egypt, both in things made from wood and things made from stone. (LXX Exod 7:19)

This passage describes different sources of water in Egypt that turned to blood: the rivers (τοὺς ποταμοὺς) here likely represent the branching of the river in the Delta, the canals branching from the river (τὰς διώρυγας), the marshy land (τὰ Ἑλη) characteristic of the Delta, collections of

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35 For a discussion on the terminology used for local water management see Bonneau, *Le régime administratif de l'eau du Nil.*

36 The Fayum region was greatly expanded under the early Ptolemies as more water was directed to flow into the area. For a specific look at the expansion of the Fayum region under the Ptolemies see Butzer, *Early Hydraulic Civilization in Egypt,* 36–38, 92–93; Manning, *Land and Power in Ptolemaic Egypt,* 99–127.

37 Psalm 78:44 (MT) mentions rivers: “He turned their rivers to blood, so that they could not drink of their streams.” (NRSV).
water (πᾶν συνεστηκὸς ὕδωρ) that could include lakes or irrigation pools, and finally any water stored for everyday use. The narrative here accounts for the different areas of the land of Egypt. However, none of the later exodus narratives copy this hydrological list. Instead, they employ different terminology. Sometimes they use the same words while other times they incorporate new terms that shed light on their contemporary physical context. The Exagoge, Philo’s Life of Moses, and to some extent the Wisdom of Solomon offer the best examples of terminological shifts in the recounting of this plague. These cases will now be examined for their choice of vocabulary.

Ezekiel the Tragedian, in his brief three lines on the first plague, mentions different sources of water in Egypt: only one of which is present in the book of Exodus:

133. πρῶτον μὲν αἷμα ποτάμων ρυήσεται
134. πηγαὶ τε πάσαι καὶ ύδάτων συστήματα.

133. now, first from the river shall flow red with blood,
134. and all the springs, and every stagnant pool. (Exagoge 133–134)

None of the terms used by Ezekiel are borrowed directly from Exodus, even the word for river is slightly different, in Exod 7:19 appearing in the plural form but in Ezekiel we have the singular and also taking on the sense “of/from the river.” The word springs (πηγαί) has been included as well as pools of water (ὑδάτων συστήματα). The Wisdom of Solomon also mentions springs in connection to the river, which was seen in the previous section (Wis 11.6). Bonneau describes the term, πηγῇ as an inexhaustible and easily accessible source. This term is one of the most popular words used in Jewish literature to describe water in Egypt, appearing also in the writings of Philo and Josephus.

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38 According to Lanfranchi, the term πηγαί can be understood as a springs or more broadly as watercourses. Lanfranchi, L’Exagoge, 222. Cf. Esch. Pers, 202.  
39 Lanfranchi, L’Exagoge, 222.  
40 Bonneau, Le régime administratif de l'eau du Nil, 91–92.
Other bodies of water are mentioned in Philo’s recounting of the first plague.

The brother of Moses, at the command of God, smote the river (τὸν ποταμόν) with his staff, and at once, from Ethiopia to the sea (θαλάσσης), it turned to blood, and so did also the lakes (λίμναι), canals (διώρυχες), springs (πηγαί), wells (φρέατα) and fountains (χρήναι) and all the existing water-supply of Egypt (σύμπασα ἡ κατ’Αἴγυπτον σύσια ὕδατος). Consequently, having nothing to drink, they dug up the ground along the banks; but the veins thus opened spouted up spirits of blood, which shot up as in haemorrhages, and not a drop of clear liquid was anywhere to be seen. (Mos., 1.99)

If we compare the LXX with Philo, there are three words that overlap: water, river, and canals and we see that the LXX includes the word “marshes” that Philo does not use. It is possible that Philo was using λίμναι to refer to the marshes as they have similar properties to lakes.\(^{41}\) However, the term is still different. For Philo, rather than stick to the LXX script of which bodies of water turned to blood, Philo gives us a much more nuanced picture of the various water sources in Egypt. He includes lakes, fountains, wells, springs, and if that wasn’t enough blood, he adds that every particle of water turned to blood.

A comparative look at the different terminology used in this particular pericope can be useful for seeing an overall picture of the terms used by Jewish Egyptian writers.

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\(^{41}\) According to Blouin, the term \textit{limnai} in the Greco-Roman world designated “not only lakes, but also stretches of water that were seen as temporary or resulting from a diversion of the river such as marshy land, seasonal lakes, and reservoirs” (\textit{Triangular Landscapes}, 135). It was quite a broad term that was sometimes used to refer to the land when it had experienced the flood. In the Delta, Blouin explains, it was very easy for the land to be submerged under flood waters as the land was very flat. See also Bonneau, \textit{Le fisc et le Nil}, 52–55.
Table 2. Comparative Analysis of Terminology in Jewish-Egyptian Exodus Narratives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>LXX Exod 7:19</th>
<th>Exagoge 133–134</th>
<th>Wisdom 11:6</th>
<th>Life 1.99</th>
<th>Documentary Papyri (# of refs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ὕδατα Αἰγύπτου</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ποτάμος</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ptolemaic (53) Roman (29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>διώρυξ</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ptolemaic (91) Roman (96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ἔλη</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ptolemaic (3) Roman (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>πᾶν συνεστηκὸς ὕδωρ</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>πηγή</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ptolemaic (11) Roman (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ύδάτων συστήματα</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>λίμναι</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ptolemaic (12) Roman (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>κρῆναι</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ptolemaic (3) Roman (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>φρέατα</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ptolemaic (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>σύμπασα ἢ κατ’Αἰγύπτων οὐσία ύδατος</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

42 This column is based on data found through word searches in the Papyri.info database, specifically focusing on the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. The reason for including this column is to demonstrate the appearance of such terminology outside of the corpus of Jewish literature to gain a better sense of the popularity of these terms in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt.
Certainly Philo was familiar with the LXX’s version of the exodus when composing the Life of Moses. What his use of different terminology suggests is that he did not draw solely upon the LXX to compose his writing, but instead he drew on the physical environment of Egypt to construct this particular image of the first plague. If we look at the city of Alexandria, it was located between lake Mareotis and the Mediterranean Sea. The lake was fed by the Nile river and was a prime habour and transportation channel (See Figure 3. Map of Schedia on page 61).

In addition to these water sources, Philo mentions the high value placed upon “flowing water” (ὑδωρ ναματιαῖον) by the Therapeutae, commonly translated as springs (De Vita 37). Furthermore, since the city was a cultural and economic hub, as well as the seat of power in Egypt, it is reasonable to assume that there were many kinds of waterworks, such as fountains, throughout the city. The city of Alexandria also used hundreds of cisterns to store their water, a detail that could perhaps be likened to Philo’s reference to all other water sources, but this remains a bit vague.

Philo’s awareness of the various sources of water informed his explanation of the extent of the devastation wrought by the first plague. While the LXX includes some bodies of water present in Egypt, Philo drew upon his surroundings to explain that all the water turned to blood, including the lakes, fountains, springs, and wells, even though they are not mentioned in the LXX.

5.2.2.1 Terminology in the Context of Egyptian Hydrology

Several of the hydric terms attested in Philo’s Life of Moses are included in Bonneau’s analysis of the main vocabulary used in Egypt to describe water during the Hellenistic, Roman, and

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43 The Centre d’Études Alexandrines has provided an overview of the water systems found in the ancient city of Alexandria. See their website: http://www.cealex.org/sitecealex/navigation/FENETR_NAVetudes_E.htm.
44 At the founding of the city of Alexandria a canal was built between Schedia and Alexandria, which provided the city with fresh water. This was vital to the survival of the city, evidenced by the fact that the city’s decline coincided with the silting up of the canal. See Isabelle Hairy, “The Study of Alexandria’s Water System,” http://www.cealex.org/sitecealex/navigation/FENETR_NAVetudes_E.htm. Dec 23, 2015. Accessed Jan 25, 2016.
45 Yonge translated it as springs. I have decided to use the more literal translation instead.
Byzantine periods. Three of these words are of interest here and significant for understanding Egyptian hydrology.

The term λίμναι describes either a lake, such as lake Moeris in the Fayum region, or a holding basin connected to the practices of irrigation. It also has been used more generally to describe the land of Egypt during the flood season. A similar reference appears in the Hebrew Bible, *yam mizraim* “sea of Egypt,” which may have similar connotations about the land being in flood like a sea (Isa 11:15).

κρῆναι refers to a fountain, understood as a source of water that is constructed and connected to the Nile as its source. It is a place to draw water, for animal or human consumption, often contained within a cistern or a reservoir. It is distinguished from a spring πηγή insofar as a κρῆναι is not gushing, like a spring.

A similar reference appears in the Hebrew Bible, *yam mizraim* “sea of Egypt,” which may have similar connotations about the land being in flood like a sea (Isa 11:15).

A final term, φρέατα is translated commonly as a “well.” What is distinctive with this term is that it is mainly found in the context of neighbourhoods, and sometimes even within houses. In Philo’s narrative, this term emphasizes the pervasiveness of the blood that did not just affect the Nile, but more local and immediate sources of water for those not living on the water’s edge.

These three words demonstrate how Philo (among others) did not consider the flowing Nile water as the only place to have been touched by the plague, rather, the plague also affected

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47 Bonneau, *Le régime administratif de l'eau du Nil*, 52. and referred to stagnant water and could be what Ezekiel the tragedian was referring to when mentioning the stagnant waters (ὑδάτων συστήματα).

48 Achilles Tatius, 4.12 “This great Nile is the centre of their existence—their river, their land, their sea, their lake.” (“Νεῖλος ὁ πολύς πάντα αὐτοῖς γίνεται, καὶ ποταμός καὶ γῆ καὶ θάλασσα καὶ λίμνη.”) Translation from S. Gaselee, *Achilles Tatius* (London: W. Heinemann, 1969). The Nile as a sea is also found in the Hebrew Bible—*yam Mizraim* (Isa 11:15).

49 See also page 175 n. 41 in this study.


52 Bonneau, *Crue*, 57, 61 n. 52, 92, 96, 127, 128.
the water located within houses, the groundwater, and water designated for irrigation. The terminology of the local water sources show how the narratives of the first plague took into consideration the complexities of Egyptian hydrology. Further, it shows how the Jewish authors’ experiences, both physical and linguistic, shaped their understanding of Egypt’s environment, which is developed in their narratives of the exodus.

5.2.2.2 Summary of Canals and Other Bodies of Water in Jewish Texts

Through a focused look at one specific pericope of the exodus narrative, the transformation of water into blood, this section has shown how the Jewish Egyptian authors employed different hydric terminology in their descriptions of the various water sources in Egypt. As the example in Philo makes explicit, the availability of water was not limited to the Nile. Moreover, the water sources in the LXX were not sufficient to reproduce word for word. Philo, thus, creates a new list that better explains the pervasiveness of the flood to his Jewish audience. The book of Exodus was important for the Jewish writers in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, but it was more important to create a narrative that their audience could relate to and understand.

53 This also clears up a point of confusion in the book of Exodus in which the Egyptians were said to have dug around the Nile to search for water (7:24). It is not clear in this verse whether this was a successful endeavour or not. According to Josephus, no other spring of water was available for the Egyptians during the plague (cf. Ant. 2.294). Similarly, Philo explains that the water was transformed back to its original state when touched by the Hebrews (Mos., 1.143–144). It was obviously difficult to understand why the Israelites would have been punished by the same plagues. Since the book of Exodus does not address this issue, later interpreters seem to use this opportunity to clear up the details.

54 Another reason for why the Jewish authors did not simply adopt the language of the LXX was suggested to me by Sylvie Honigman in a meeting at SBL in November 2015. She offered some examples of the common practice of ancient authors whereby they regularly changed lists of words or numbers when retelling a story in order to make the text more of their own. An example can be seen in the dimensions of the altar in Jerusalem according to Josephus (20 cubits long and 10 cubits high), who is expanding the description found in Exod 27:1 (5 cubits long and 3 cubits high). There are many examples like this one, especially in terms of the population of Jerusalem and Alexandria or the size of Jerusalem. In Wright’s commentary on the Letter of Aristeas he presents the theory of Moses Hadas that these exaggerations are evidence of synkrisis, a rhetorical exercise that aims to show that one thing is better than another. It doesn’t appear that Philo here is providing a better account than that of Exodus, however it is worth pointing out that it was a common practice in antiquity to ‘play’ with the details of a text. Wright, Letter of Aristeas, 223–25; Moses Hadas, Aristeas to Philocrates (Letter of Aristeas) (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951), 50, 143.
5.2.3 The Sea of Reeds

5.2.3.1 The Sea

The crossing of the Sea of Reeds was an important event mentioned repeatedly in Jewish writings from the Second Temple period. Even apart from exodus narratives, it is referred to often in different texts. For example, the voices of Philo’s Therapeutae are likened to the singing of Moses and Miriam at the sea (De Vita, 85–87), and in 1 Corinthians crossing the sea is viewed as a kind of baptism (1 Cor 10:1–2). In the exodus narratives composed in Egypt, the event shares many similarities to that found in the book of Exodus; the main chain of events and the triumphant defeat of the enemies are found in both. However, some notable differences also appear when we look closely at the texts. This section will focus on the descriptions of the sea and the sea path. I will demonstrate that these Jewish authors were not simply reading and interpreting the book of Exodus, but that they modified the story in a way that fit in with their knowledge of the physical landscape.

In the Hebrew book of Exodus, the sea that the Israelites cross on their way out of Egypt is called the Sea of Reeds, a hydronym that presumably stems from the presence of reeds in the region. Yet upon its translation into Greek, the name was rendered ἔρυθρὰν θάλασσαν, meaning Red Sea. Later interpreters who read the Hebrew version, like Rashi and Ibn Ezra, understood the name to refer to the “Sea of Reeds.” Yet, it was the Greek translation of the sea as the “Red Sea” that came to influence later traditions, mainly the Vulgate. As a result, the Red Sea became the popular name of the body of water crossed in the Exodus narrative. The crossing of the Red Sea is an event that appears in all of the exodus narratives composed in Egypt, demonstrating its importance to the story as early as the Hellenistic period. Even the Wisdom of Solomon, which markedly does not mention specific names of individuals, mentions the Red Sea by name (Wis 10.18, 19.7).

55 Some biblical examples include Ps 78:13–14, 53 (MT); 106:9–11 (MT); 136:13–15 (MT); Neh 9:9, 11.

56 Although, as noted in Propp’s commentary on Exodus, there are in fact no reeds in the area of the Red Sea or the Suez Canal. This has caused some scholars to suggest that the location was closer to the Nile. Another explanation is that it does not mean “Sea of Reeds” but it is the “border, terminal sea.” This has been proposed by a number of scholars but refuted by others. See Propp, Exodus, 486–87.
The exodus narratives from Egypt each describe the sea and the path through the sea in different ways. According to the book of Exodus, the sea is simply the sea (θάλασσαν). There is little describing it beyond being a particular non-descript body of water. In the narrative, Moses is instructed to raise his staff and extend his hand over the water (14:16). This action causes a wind that divides the sea into two (14:21). The text describes the path as being in between two walls of water (14:22; 15:18). Once the Israelites have safely crossed, Moses again stretches out his hand at which point the water returns and covers the Egyptians (14:26–28). The only descriptive feature of the sea in this account appear in Exodus 15. The song of Moses mentions violent water in 15:10.

Some differences appear between MT and LXX. For example, the LXX version proposes new meanings for the Hebrew word tehom (depths), which appears twice in chapter 15, each time translated into different Greek words. First, in 15:5 the Greek πόντῳ, which refers to the sea but not its depths, is used. Second, in 15:8, instead of the depths in the Hebrew we have the word μέσῳ, referring to the middle of the sea (instead of the depths of the sea).

The fragments from Artapanus similarly give little detail about the sea itself, albeit the text is far shorter than that in the book of Exodus. The text explains that there are two different traditions of the story, that of the Memphites and that of the Heliopolitans. The Memphites believed that Moses watched the ebb tide of the sea (ἄμπωτιν, 9.27.34) to determine when it was safe to cross the sea. The Heliopolitans have a more robust account similar to that of the book of Exodus. They claim that Moses struck the sea with the rod causing it to divide, which created a dry path for the Israelites to cross. When the Egyptians came upon the path, the sea flooded (ἐπικλύσαι—same term used in the LXX) and they were all destroyed. This brief account is

58 Propp, Exodus, 516–17.
59 According to Propp, the LXX emphasizes the active role of God in the text. Instead of being covered by the depths (tehom), the LXX reads “he covered them with the Sea” (Propp, Exodus, 472). Interestingly, in the Samaritan Targum we see a return to the version contained in MT whereby the depths cover them. Propp also notes that the reason behind the difference between MT and LXX is that in the Hebrew there is a gender confusion between the words “cover” (masculine) and “depths” (feminine). This is not often a reason for emendation but perhaps this was what the LXX translators were trying to clear up. Propp, Exodus, 72–73.
60 Nothing is noted by Propp about this textual change. Propp, Exodus, 473.
interesting insofar as it suggests that there were different theories about the narrative in the second century BCE.

The crossing of the Red Sea in the *Exagoge* is told from the perspective of an Egyptian who watches the events unfold. The Israelites are camped out at a strand (ἀκτήν) of the Red Sea (206). Moses strikes the *surface* of the sea (νῶτον) with his rod and the depths go asunder dividing the sea (ἐσχίσεν): ἔτυψ᾽ Ἐρυθρᾶς νῶτα καὶ ἐσχίσεν μέσον βάθος Θαλάσσης (227–228). After the Israelites cross, a mighty wave gushes forth and floods the path (242). There are far more descriptive adjectives used here making it seem more exciting and real that in the book of Exodus. This may in part be because the *Exagoge* was meant for the stage. Since not everything could be easily acted out, it needed to paint a picture of the events as it was meant for entertainment.61

The *Wisdom of Solomon* does not recreate a linear account of the crossing; rather, it weaves together the story of the Israelites’ time in Egypt, the plagues, and the wilderness wanderings. In chapter 10 only two verses refer to the crossing of the Red Sea (v.18–19), and only one in chapter 19 (v. 7). Despite the paucity of verses, several interesting terms are used in these passages. First of all, in the description of the crossing of the Red Sea, it is lady wisdom, not Moses, who guides her people through “deep waters” (ὑδατος πολλοῦ), and who engulfs her enemies and casts them up from the deep (ἐκ βάθους ἀβύσσου ἀνέβρασεν αὐτοῖς) (v. 18–19).

18. διεβίβασεν αὐτοὺς βάλασσαν ἐρυθράν καὶ διήγαγεν αὐτοὺς δι᾽ ὕδατος πολλοῦ.
19. τοὺς δὲ ἐχθροὺς αὐτῶν κατέκλυσεν καὶ ἐκ βάθους ἀβύσσου ἀνέβρασεν αὐτοὺς.

18. She led them across the Red Sea and brought them through deep water, 19. but their enemies she drowned, and from the bottom of the deep she cast them up. (Wis 10.18–19)

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In verse 18 there is much water, or deep water. And in verse 19 we again have deep water, or as Peter Enns translates, “bottomless depths.”62 Drowning in the depths is a popular motif not only in the Hebrew Bible but also in Egyptian literature.63 In this description of the Egyptians being drowned in the depths, the author of Wisdom contrasts on the one hand the Israelites walking through them safely with the drowning of their enemies on the other. But according to Wisdom, the Egyptians are then cast up from the depths, inserting a new detail into the narrative.64

Philo’s account is the most descriptive version of the four texts. According to Philo, it was an unnavigable sea (ἀπλώτοις πελάγεσιν). The term πελάγεσιν is often invoked in reference to the high seas or open sea, a dangerous place to navigate.65 As the Hebrews camped along the shore (ἡϊόσι) and the Egyptians rushed towards them a south wind blew, causing the sea to ebb (Mos., 1.176). Philo likened this event to a torrent (χαράδραν) and a whirlpool (χαρύβδιν) (1.176). When Moses struck the sea, a path appeared and the Hebrews crossed safely. The Egyptians, on the other hand, entered the path and the waters poured over them as a huge wave (τρικυμίαις) (1.179). Philo’s narrative serves to enhance the precarity of the situation for the Hebrews, by emphasizing that the sea was not navigable, its violence as it is compared to a whirlpool, and how it’s vast waves and overpowering billows destroy the Egyptian army.

5.2.3.2 The Sea Path

In addition to the language of the sea, which is more varied in these Egyptian versions than we find in the book of Exodus, further details emerge when we focus on how the sea path is described in the texts. In the book of Exodus, the dry sea path emerges in the midst of the sea (μέσον τῆς θαλάσσης κατὰ τὸ ξηρόν) (Exod 14:16). The dryness of the path and its location in the middle of the sea is repeatedly mentioned (Exod 14:22–23, 29; 15:19). Artapanus describes a

62 Enns, Exodus Retold, 70. See also Cheon, The Exodus Story in the Wisdom of Solomon.
63 For more on this motif of depths, see Propp, Exodus, 516–17.
64 The author of Wisdom uses the same word here as Philo. See Winston, Wisdom of Solomon, 221.
65 The same term is invoked in CIJ II 1537 from Ptolemaic El-Kanais in the inscription documenting the Jew’s thankfulness for being saved from the sea (πελάγους).
similar scene whereby there was a dry path that emerged out of the sea (ξηρᾶς τῆς βαλάσσης) (27.35). This path is also referred to as ὁδὸς (9.27.36, 37). Ezekiel the Tragedian describes the path as a passage or straight (πόρος) and that it was salty (ἀλμυρᾶς) (242). He also refers to it as a short cut (ἀτραποῦ). The Wisdom of Solomon offers a similar picture of the path being dry (ξηρᾶς γῆς), but also tells us that the bottom of the sea was unhindered (ὁδὸς ἀνεπόδιστος) and herb-bearing (χλοηφόρον πεδίον). Finally, Philo explains that the path was wide (ὁδὸς εὐρεῖα) and people carrying (λεωφόρος). He also uses the term ἀτραποῦ, same as Ezekiel, to describe the dry path.

Features of the Red Sea emerge from these Egyptian narratives. Not only is it a path through the sea, it is salty (says Ezekiel) and herb-bearing (according to Wisdom). Philo emphasizes that it is wide and can carry people. None of these descriptions stand in contrast to the book of Exodus, but rather demonstrate some of the ideas about the Red Sea that were in circulation at the time. Moreover, these ideas were considered necessary to include on the part of the Jewish authors, providing a further level of detail to the foundational narrative.

5.2.3.3 Summary of the Red Sea in Jewish Texts

The study of the Red Sea account has shown the varied language used to communicate the story. While none veers too far off of the basic storyline, details about the sea and the path formed out of the sea reveal the differences in how the authors constructed their narratives. As demonstrated previously, the LXX was drawn upon but did not prevent these Jewish authors from enhancing the details of the story and offering further characterizations of the events, giving the story dimension. The book of Exodus was an important source, but the focus for the authors of the

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66 For a discussion, see Enns, Exodus Retold, 120–21. Similar accounts can be found in Rabbinic Literature (midr. The. 114.38; Exod. Rab. 21.10) and in Pliny, Natural History, 13.25.

67 James Kugel explains that the grassy plain is an exegetical motif that developed in response to Isa 63:13–14. He argues that ancient interpreters used this verse to read Exodus 14–15 which explains why the path through the water becomes “grassy” (Wisdom) or a green valley (Targum Ps.-Jonathan Exod 15.19). Kugel, Traditions of the Bible, 590.
narratives composed later seems to have been more on narrating the story rather than a strict adherence to its more ancient version.

5.3 Challenges and Observations: Hydric Terminology and the Jews of Egypt

This chapter has thus far examined the language used to refer to the hydric environment of Egypt in the four exodus narratives from Egypt. The terms were identified and attempts were made to place them into conversation with one another as well as alongside terminology found in other sources, such as the LXX or documentary texts. In this final section I will now briefly explore some of the challenges that this endeavor has presented and identify some of the implications of the data collected insofar as it contributes to our understanding of Egyptian Judaism in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt.

I encountered two challenges in the course of my analysis. First, while many terms were used in the exodus narratives, there were a very limited number of Jewish documentary sources that used the same terminology. As a result, I relied more on documentary evidence that was not specific to Judaism when exploring different hydric terminology found in texts. For example, while *limne* does not appear specifically in the Jewish documentary sources, the meaning of this word is known from other contemporary documentary and textual evidence, which provides a thorough understanding of the term and its hydrological context. Second, there are geographical differences between the exodus narratives and the documentary sources. The former were most likely all composed in Alexandria, while the latter were mainly found outside of Alexandria. Not only are these locations different, the hydric features of the environment are also not the same (as shown in chapter one of this study). For example, Alexandria experiences some rainfall while Edfu receives little to none. Such regional hydrological differences must be accounted for in an effort to avoid overgeneralizations about the environment of Egypt. In other words, the Jews of Egypt would have experienced water differently depending on their particular geographical location in Egypt.

Two observations can be made based on the data detailed in this chapter. The first involves the significance of the LXX to the Jews of Egypt. It has been well established that the
LXX was very important for Egyptian Jews. From the stories tracing its origins to Alexandria in the *Letter of Aristeas*, Josephus, and Philo, to the widespread familiarity with the LXX for Jewish authors living in Egypt, the LXX was a foundational Jewish text. Yet, the presence and popularity of the LXX in Egypt did not mean that Jewish authors were not given space to interpret the narratives in new ways. In the case of the exodus narratives from Egypt we see that while they follow the basic storyline of the exodus, they depart in significant ways from using the specific language put forth in the LXX. The terms used to describe the hydric setting of Egypt are far more varied in the Jewish-Egyptian exodus narratives than in the LXX. It is my claim that the reason for these departures from the LXX is that they instead chose terminology from their own experiences. For example, in his first plague account Philo’s choice to include fountains in his list of water sources in Egypt that turned to blood may have been because of his experience seeing many fountains in the city of Alexandria. As such, his personal experiences with water in Alexandria shaped the way he constructed his narrative.

A second observation is that despite challenges, it is possible to draw connections between the documentary evidence and the literary texts. Moreover, connections can also be more than the presence of singular words. In this chapter I encountered only a few examples where the same word could be found in both a literary text and a documentary source specifically related to a Jewish experience. Yet, what also emerged from looking at the exodus narratives alongside one another and other documentary sources is a new perspective of the literature as seen within a larger context of Egyptian Judaism. It is not only about texts borrowing from other texts; rather, it is about the larger context of Egyptian Judaism as composed of individuals experiencing the environment of Egypt in different ways. The diversity of terminology attests to the varied experiences of the Jews of Egypt and further supports viewing the Jews of Egypt as a diverse group.

### 5.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, by placing the exodus narratives from Egypt beside the LXX and documentary sources, we can gain a better sense of how the Jews of Egypt engaged with and understood their environmental context. Despite the challenges of the available source material, the evidence suggests that Jewish authors drew on their experiences and not solely on the LXX for their
descriptions of the physical environment. This chapter has also shown another way that the Jews of Egypt adapted to life in Egypt, through the writing of the exodus story. The particular differences in the accounts further highlight the physical setting of the Jewish authors and the importance of looking at the Jews as a diverse group within the land of Egypt.
**Epilogue: The Fluvial Experiences of the Jews of Egypt**

**Introduction**

This study set out to explore the relationship between Jews and the fluvial environment of Egypt in the Ptolemaic and Roman period. During these periods, many Jews migrated to Egypt establishing communities throughout the land. These Jews not only adapted culturally and socially to living in the Diaspora, they also adapted to living in radically different environmental contexts. One of the main differences between Egypt and Palestine is the accessibility of water. In Palestine, water comes primarily from the sky or the Jordan river and in antiquity, it was stored for use during the dry season. Egypt, however, relied on the Nile’s annual inundation to water its crops. The settlement of the Jews in Egypt was not only significant regarding its political, social, or economic impact, it changed the way that Jews engaged with its most precious resource for existence, water.

Through a comparative reading of four exodus narratives composed in Egypt, this study focused on three examples of how the unique hydric environment of Egypt shaped Jewish writings: there was a shift in perspectives towards the land of Egypt, the development of fluvial concepts, and the adoption of new terminology. By examining these adaptations, this study sought to provide a more nuanced understanding of Jewish life in Egypt that was tied to the physical setting of Egyptian Jews. As a result, it offered a way of thinking about Judaism as connected to its physical place, an area of study that has largely been unexplored. This project therefore asked how water, or the hydric context of Egypt, became an important part of Jewish life. Water was used for everything from agricultural production to ritual washing. In addition, building on theories of place, I have looked more broadly at the role that place can play in shaping Jewish life. The Jews of Egypt were not simply focused on returning to the “promised land;” they also thrived in Egypt, which became a home for the Jews, a place for them to reside. This conclusion will offer a synthesis of the primary findings of this project. It will also address some of the implications raised by the research and detail future directions and avenues of study. I will conclude with a discussion on the overall significance of this project for the study of Early Judaism.
Synthesis of Findings

A number of questions guided this project. In chapter one, I asked how the Jews of Egypt engaged with water. This chapter consisted of a discussion on what it meant to examine the Jews in Egypt, not just the Jews of Egypt. Through a categorization of Jewish engagements with water, gleaned from both documentary and literary sources, it offered a picture of the diverse ways that water figured into the lives of Jews. While much of the focus on Judaism and water in scholarship has centered on the role of miqva’ot, largely due to its importance in the rabbinic period, water was not only important for ritual life; it was also vital to one’s everyday survival. In Egypt, the Jews lived alongside bodies of water, paid for water, washed in water, and worked with or on water. These largely mundane activities, which they practiced alongside other communities in the diaspora, were seen to be important for establishing Jews as physical beings and not simply as producers of texts.

In the second chapter, I examined the four main texts of my study: namely the exodus narratives composed in Egypt. I asked what connected these narratives specifically to the land of Egypt and explained why these texts are particularly illuminating for understanding Judaism in Egypt. Through a close reading, I showed that each of my four main texts exhibited certain features that connected them specifically to the physical land of Egypt: (1) an emphasis on life in Egypt, (2) the characterization of Moses as a leader and not a lawgiver, and (3) the elaborate descriptions of the physical environment. These texts, therefore, were not only recasting a Jewish narrative that took place in Egypt; rather, they were also incorporating their author’s experiences of this land into their accounts.

The third chapter inquired about the role of place in shaping a narrative. While chapter two determined three common features of the texts that connected them to the land of Egypt, chapter three looked at how writing in the place of Egypt specifically shaped the details of the story. The term topophilia, as developed by Tuan, was used to explore this relationship between people and place. I argued that when compared to other exodus narratives, those from Egypt made a distinction between the people and the land of Egypt. For Jewish authors, the land of Egypt and its geological features were viewed positively and the people of Egypt negatively. This distinction is specific to the texts found in Egypt and shows how the Jews came to embrace living in Egypt, while maintaining their separate Jewish identity.
The relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish ideas about the Nile flood was questioned in chapter four. Specifically, I examined Jewish theories about the Nile’s annual flood that only appear in three exodus narratives from Egypt (Artapanus’ *On the Jews*, *Wisdom of Solomon*, and Philo’s *Life of Moses*). While scholars have studied theories of the flood in Egyptian and Greek literature, no one had asked how the Jews understood this natural phenomenon. The appearance of Jewish theories, borrowed but adapted from Greek and Egyptian ideas, demonstrates how the Jews were engaged with their environment, both physically and culturally, and how they actively participated in discussions on a popular topic of exploration in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

The fifth chapter looked more closely at the hydric terminology found in the Jewish exodus narratives. Through an analysis of the terms used to identify the Nile, canals, and the Red Sea, this chapter asked whether the exodus narratives from Egypt illuminated a shifted understanding of the environment of Egypt. It concluded that there was a tendency to use more contemporary language to Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt instead of relying on terminology present in the LXX. The chapter showed that Jewish writers were not only concerned with relaying the narrative as it was conveyed in the LXX. The authors were also interested in making it relevant to their audiences by adopting more popular language.

**Implications**

This study has several implications for understanding the Jews of Egypt and Judaism in the Second Temple period more broadly. First, the study of the Jewish engagements with water in Egypt highlights the physicality and materiality of Jewish experiences. The Jews of Egypt did not simply read Torah and interpret its narratives; they were also active members of society. They lived near, worked with, and sometimes married Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans. These communities have often been studied either in terms of the books they produced or their material remains. My study, however, offers another perspective whereby the Jews are understood as part of a lived environment that contains both textual and material contexts.

Second, this study has highlighted how water is not only important for ritual practices; it was vital for everyday life. We can learn a lot about the Jews of Egypt by considering how they
used and discussed water. For example, the Jews of Arsinoe paid their own water bill (C.Pap.Jud. II 432) and the Letter of Aristeas explained that the translators washed their hands in the sea prior to translating the Torah (Let. Aris. 306–308). These examples show how water was part of both mundane and religious life. By looking at both uses of water we can gain a broader understanding of how they lived and thrived in the land of Egypt. Additionally, water is a social equalizer. While texts primarily speak to the upper classes of society, everyone deals with water to some extent. By looking at both the textual but also the material context, the project gives a way for integrating these two often disparate areas of study.

Third, the diversity of Jewish experiences in the Second Temple period has been further illuminated. The Jews of Egypt are often viewed as a collective group, in the same way as the Jews of Antioch or Rome are similarly grouped. This study has shown the diversity of Judaism within Egypt by paying attention to differences between the Ptolemaic and Roman periods as well as regions within Egypt. The Jews living in Roman Alexandria were vastly different from the Jews of the Ptolemaic Fayum. Therefore, forms of Judaism were not static or consistent in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt. Instead, this study has shown regional and temporal differences within the Jewish communities in Egypt, resulting in a more nuanced understanding of Egyptian Judaism. Moreover, the Jews of Egypt were not a static group. Specific traumatic events—such as the Alexandrian conflict of 37–41 CE—and the movements of groups of Jews from one place to another—such as the mention of Theban Jews in Arsinoe or the movement of Elephantine Jews to Edfu and Thebes—demonstrates the fluidity of these communities. For this reason, attention to the period of time and the socio-political events helps to further situate such groups in time and place.

**Future Direction**

The research conducted in this project has opened several areas for future exploration. The first area that would be worth exploring further is the formation of Jewish identity in Egypt. The current project has focused primarily on the presence of fluvial terminology and concepts in Jewish writings from Egypt. What was not explored in depth was how the fluvial context shaped the identity of Egyptian Jews. The study of identity formation is complex and was not the focus of this project. Nevertheless, as identity was addressed at certain points in this study, it would be
an interesting topic to explore in terms of an identity tied to the place of Egypt. Providing further insight into how the Jews of Egypt maintained their Judaism while developing a new form of Judaism that was specifically connected to the land of Egypt.

Another future area of research could involve looking more closely at theories of place and how we can better understand the diversity of Judaisms in Egypt as connected to different environments. This study suggested that Egypt is not a singular place; rather, it consists of diverse regions. However, the specific features of these places and how they map onto an overall picture of the landscape of Egypt could be further developed. In particular by bringing more Jewish texts into the analysis and by expanding the timeframe to take into consideration the Cairo Geniza materials. Looking more broadly at how a place shapes a community over several centuries could give a better picture of Judaism in Egypt.

The connection between people and place could also be used for understanding other Jewish communities in other places. While the importance of land has been explored in connection to the promised land, there have been comparatively few studies that look at the ways in which other locations shape Jewish life. Instead of the dualistic picture of Israel and diaspora that often dominates scholarship in Second Temple Judaism, such a study could complicate this picture through the study of the importance of place to the diasporic communities of the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

Final Thoughts

This study has provided a different model for investigating Judaism in Egypt. By bringing together material, documentary, and literary evidence, it has shown the centrality of the physical context to Judaism as it developed in Egypt. The project has raised many questions about Jewish life and has explored some of its implications for the study of Judaism in antiquity. Moreover, it has also opened up new avenues of study and research questions that would further contribute to our understanding of early Judaism. The hydric environment of Egypt was not only present in the background of Jewish experiences in Egypt. Rather, the physical fluvial world was central to the formation of Egyptian Judaism in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt.
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