Notes on the Temple of Onias at Leontopolis

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Rabbinic literature written in Hebrew and Aramaic is a largely untapped source for the history of the ancient world. Here and there it has been used with some measure of success for the critical reconstruction of literary, legal and—to some extent—social history of ancient Jewry in Babylonia, Palestine and some adjoining regions by, e.g., Gedalya Alon, Saul Lieberman and, more recently, Martin Goodman. But, on the whole, the difficulties inherent in the sources seem to have deterred ancient historians from systematically examining and exploiting for their purposes what is one of the largest bodies of literature surviving from antiquity. The reasons for that are varied: There are superstitious fears about linguistic difficulties and superstitious delusions no less unjustified and deceptive about the allegedly narrow range of rabbinic literature. One glance at the works of learned scholars like Paul de Lagarde and Eduard Schwartz suffices to make one aware of the loss of opportunities due not only to prejudice, animosity and, occasionally, wilful and hence invincible ignorance, but to a general lack of awareness of the breadth and depth of the materials to be found in the records of ancient rabbinic Jewry. In this paper I shall confine myself to examining a problem of no more than minuscule, local, toponomastic interest in early Byzantine Egypt. I shall argue that even what is obviously a mistake in a rabbinic source may, in one way or another, contribute to our knowledge.

Few things are as certain about Jewish attitudes to liturgical arrangements in the late biblical period and in proto-rabbinic Judaism as the exclusive attachment to the Temple in Jerusalem. The Temple was not only the primary centre of divine worship but the one place in which sacrifices could be offered. It was strictly and strenuously distinguished from pagan and sectarian cult locations, the more so if the latter pretended to be authentically Jewish like, for instance, the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim.¹ Pagan gods, even though they might have a special connexion

¹ This was destroyed, according to Josephus, by John Hyrcanus, apparently in 129/8 B.C. See Josephus, AJ 13. 254 ff.; cf. Megillat Ta' anit, cap. IX sub 21 Kislev. See also E. Schürer, Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi I (4th ed., Leipzig 1901) 264 (Engl. tr.: G. Vermes and F. Millar [edd.], The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus
with a particular, perhaps pre-eminent, shrine or place, would have temples and altars in many places. Not so the God of Israel: It was in Jerusalem that He had promised to dwell with His people forever, in Zion that there would be the habitation of His honour and the seat of His throne. And as God was jealous of other gods, so was He also jealous for Jerusalem, the abode He had chosen in which to set His name. No other place was worthy to be His dwelling.  

For the Persian period, we have, of course, the well-known papyrological sources concerning a temple at Elephantine near Syene (Assuan) in Upper Egypt. Of this temple we have no archaeological remains and it has left no traces in ancient literature. Our evidence indicates that it was used by the small military colony of Aramaic-speaking Jews and their families; but it cannot have had any more than local significance.

In the Hellenistic period the evidence for Jewish shrines outside Jerusalem is meagre. Apart from the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim mentioned above and the temple of Onias in Egypt, the location of which is the subject of this paper, recent work enables us to conclude that substantial literary or archaeological information about Jewish shrines outside Jerusalem is practically non-existent.

Two sites are principally concerned, at Lachish and at 'Arâq el-Emîr. The so-called Solar Temple at Lachish, which Aharoni had thought was a Hellenistic structure used for Jewish cult purposes, probably was, in the Hellenistic period, not a Jewish sanctuary at all; it therefore need not detain us here any further.

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2 See, e.g., Jer. 3. 17, 17. 12, Ez. 43. 7–9, Joel 4. 17, 4. 21, Zach. 2. 14–15, 8. 3, Ps. 26. 8, 74. 2, 132. 13–14, 135. 21, Neh. 1. 9, I Chr. 23. 25, II Chr. 6. 6 ff. For the general tendency in the Hebrew Bible to confine the sacrificial cult to one place, cf. Dt. 12. 5 ff., 11–14, 18, Jos. 22. 10 to end of chapter. And see Philo, Spec. leg. 1. 67, Josephus, Ap. 2. 193 (see on this especially the note ad loc. by J. G. Müller, Des Flavius Josephus Schrift gegen den Apion [Basel 1877; repr. Hildesheim–New York 1969] 314) and AJ 4. 200–01.

3 E. Sachau, Aramäische Papyrus und Ostraka in einer jüdischen Militärkolonie zu Elephantine (Leipzig 1911); A. E. Cowley, Jewish Documents of the Time of Ezra (London 1919); idem, Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C. (Oxford 1923); E. G. H. Kraeling, The Brooklyn Museum Aramaic Papyri (New Haven 1953); B. Porten, Archives from Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony (Berkeley 1968); for a fuller bibliography see EJ VI 610.


5 See for this Campbell (previous note) 166.
Excavations at 'Arâq el-Emîr in Jordan have uncovered what some scholars\(^6\) have thought to be the remains of an unfinished temple built by one of the Tobiads, Hyrcanus the son of Joseph, in the second century B.C. The arguments adduced do not seem to be convincing; but in any case, even if we accepted the dating and the identification of the structure as a temple we should still have to ponder the relationship of this building to one that is mentioned by Josephus (AJ 12. 230; see Campbell 162–63) as having been built by that same Hyrcanus and called a “fortress,” βάρις ἱπχυρά. It was pointed out long ago by Arnaldo Momigliano that the Tobiads had, even in the Persian period, been hostile to Jerusalem; that the βαρίς had been in existence as early as the third century; and that its construction should be attributed not to Hyrcanus in the second century but to another Tobiad, a contemporary of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (regn. 285–46).\(^7\) The unreliability of Josephus or his source\(^8\) in this matter, combined with the weakness of the archaeological evidence, allows us to discount, in any inquiry on Jewish shrines outside Jerusalem in the period of the Second Commonwealth, the case made for the existence of a Jewish temple at 'Arâq el-Emîr.\(^9\) There is no need to conclude (with Campbell 163) from the evidence that “the building must have been used by Jews if a Tobiad built it, and furthermore it probably had more than purely local significance.” It is indeed interesting that Campbell refers (ibid.) to the likelihood that “vestiges of the old Tobiad-Samaritan association persisted.” But it is not clear why Campbell is so certain that in this region “there must have been a large number of Jews increasingly disenchanted with the Jerusalem temple and politically opposed to the Jerusalem alignments, for whom the ‘Arâq temple would have become the religious center.” We have nothing here that could strengthen an argument purporting to show that there were in the Hellenistic period any significant Jewish shrines in the Palestinian region outside Jerusalem.

We come now to the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim. From the point of view of mainstream Judaism the building of that temple must have signalled the separation of the Samaritans from the people of God. This judgment is supported both by explicit rabbinic statements and by historical

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\(^6\) See Campbell (above, note 4) 162–64 for details and literature; for other, earlier, scholars who have identified the structure on the site as a temple, see Momigliano, Quinto contributo (next note) 605 with notes.


\(^9\) Even were one to assume that at some time in the early Hellenistic epoch there existed a "Jewish" temple on the site of 'Arâq el-Emîr, there can be no doubt that it would have been a dissident temple; see Momigliano, Quinto contributo (above, note 7) 606.
parallels. We are told in Massekhet Kuttim, cap. II, *ad fin.*, that it is by giving up their attachment to Mount Gerizim that the Samaritans can gain re-admission to the fold, and we are, I submit, entitled to compare Samaritan separatism (as exemplified in the building of their own temple) to the hostility of the Qumran sectarians towards the Temple in Jerusalem. It was this, rather than their idiosyncratic messianic and apocalyptic doctrines, that marked the latter off as sectarians who would in the end sever themselves from the community of the House of Israel. The temple on Mount Gerizim was the clearest possible monument to the separation of the Samaritans from the body of the Jewish people.

In view of the strong evidence for the concentration of the sacrificial cult in Jerusalem it is all the more noteworthy that at the very time of the religious and national re-awakening associated with the resistance to Seleucid rule in Palestine there existed a Jewish temple in Egypt established by a member of the high-priestly family descended from Simon Justus. This temple was founded, in the second century B.C., under Ptolemy VI Philometor (c. 186–45; regn. 180–45) by a son of the High Priest Onias III. This man is conventionally referred to as Onias IV, although he did not, in fact, serve as High Priest in Jerusalem. He had fled to Egypt (c. 162–60) for reasons which are not wholly clear. Josephus reports fear of the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Tcherikover suggests the enmity towards Onias of Jewish hellenizers in Jerusalem as motivating his flight. According to rabbinic accounts, his flight was occasioned by an intra-family feud about the succession to Onias III. In Egypt Onias was hospitably

10 We must not be misled by the romanticising, archaeology-fed nostalgia and enthusiasm aroused by the discoveries in the Judean desert into thinking that the sectarians there were authentically Jewish. They had strong Jewish roots, like the Samaritans and the Christians; like both these offshoots of Second Commonwealth Judaism they developed intense enmities to the normative stream of the religion of Israel. Since we have gained from these discoveries so much that enriches our knowledge of the period as well as a good deal of literature written in the ancient language of the Jews, we tend, sometimes unthinkingly, to adopt these sectarians as authentically Jewish and to forget that they were inveterate heretics and enemies of the Jerusalem establishment.

11 See on this, e.g., V. Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* (Philadelphia 1959; repr. New York 1970) 276 ff. and M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism I* (Jerusalem 1974) 405 ff.; but see also B. Schaller, "Onias," in *Der Kleine Pauly* IV (Munich 1979) 303–04; Schaller, like some other scholars before him, argues that the Onias who founded the temple in Leontopolis was Onias III, and that Onias IV may never have existed ("ist wahrscheinlich eine fingierte Größe")

12 Josephus, *BJ* 1. 33, 7. 423, *AJ* 12. 387. Antiochus IV had died in 164/3. In the *BJ*, though not in the *AJ*, Josephus may have been thinking of Onias III; see Tcherikover (previous note) 276.

13 See Tcherikover, *CPJ* I (1957) 2, who, however (ibid. note 12] 44), points out that Onias IV may himself have been a hellenizer in spite of his opposition to the hellenistic party in Jerusalem.

15 PT Yoma 43d and BT Menahot 109b ff.
received by Ptolemy and Cleopatra, who granted him some land in the nome of Heliopolis. There he founded a military colony for Jewish settlers and a temple for their use. These settlers may have come with him from Palestine or he may have raised a Jewish military force after his arrival in Egypt; indeed he may have founded the colony and the temple as late as 145 B.C., shortly before Ptolemy’s death.¹⁶ There is no foundation for the suggestion that Ptolemy Philometor intended to found a cultic centre for the Jews in the Delta to counterbalance the importance and attraction of the temple in Jerusalem,¹⁷ and there is no evidence whatsoever that the temple of Onias had at any time more than merely local significance.¹⁸ The temple at Leontopolis existed until after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem; it was demolished on the orders of Vespasian in A.D. 73.¹⁹

Apart from the rabbinic references (see below), our main source for the history of Onias and his temple is Josephus.²⁰ The temple is never mentioned by Alexandrian writers and it seems that Egyptian Jewry was not much interested in this Palestinian immigrant foundation.²¹

We have a number of rabbinic reports referring to the shrine of Onias.²² These regularly describe the temple of Onias as בית הLOODד. The word תדיה, though it does not univocally = temple, naturally is capable of being used in a phrase referring to a temple; cf., e.g., כה תלודד, בית הLOODד, etc.

¹⁶ See Tcherikover (above, note 12) 279 ff.
¹⁸ This should be weighed in any consideration of the argument put forward by A. Momigliano (Aegyptus 12 [1932] 161-72, and esp. 170-71) that there existed or that there may have existed a Greek translation of the Old Testament in the Temple of Leontopolis different from the Septuagint; that this version (“accolta o curata dai sacerdoti leontopolitanis”) was circulating in Egypt in competition with the LXX; and that the legend of the Greek translation of the Bible propagated by the author of the Letter of Aristeas had a polemical purpose directed against the Leontopolitan temple. I know of no evidence that would support any part of this argument. In any case, it is to be noted that Momigliano relies not only on a fairly late date for the work of Ps.-Aristeas but, more seriously, on what seems to me a vastly inflated estimate of the importance of the Leontopolis temple; we cannot even say that the population for whom this temple was built was Greek-speaking rather than Aramaic-speaking; for all we know they spoke Egyptian. Though there is evidence that the Greek Bible was read in the countryside in the second century B.C., it seems clear on the whole that the Jews living in the κhora were assimilating fast to their Egyptian-speaking neighbours. See Tcherikover, CPJ I (1957) 43-46.
¹⁹ Josephus, BJ 7. 421.
²¹ We may disregard Sibylline Oracles 5. 501, 507, where some scholars have seen an allusion to the temple of Onias; see Tcherikover (above, note 12) 499 n. 28 and, more generally, idem in CPJ I (1957) 20 f. and 44 ff., with notes (and literature cited in his n. 117) and idem, Jews and Greeks in the Hellenistic Period (Tel Aviv 1963) 220 ff. and nn. (Hebrew). Cf. P. M. Fraser, Ptolemaic Alexandria (Oxford 1972) I 83 with nn. 301 ff. (in vol. II, pp. 162 f.).
²² Mishna Menahot 13. 10, PT Yoma 43d, BT Menahot 109a ff., BT Megilla 10a, BT AZ 52b.
Interestingly, where the actual construction of the temple is reported, the word **ἱερόν** = altar is used, thus making it quite unmistakable that the reference is to a foundation meant to be used for the performance of sacrifices.\(^{24}\) Similarly, Josephus speaks of the temple as a ναὸς or ναῶς and ἵερον; and in the same context he refers to Isaiah 19. 19 f. as predicting the κατασκευὴ τοῦ ναοῦ.\(^{25}\) Isaiah actually has there ἱερὸν ἱλάτων. It is interesting that this same passage is quoted also in both Talmudim, in the same context.\(^{26}\) The LXX translates ἱερὸν correctly as θυσιαστήριον, and Josephus, too, knows that text: ἐστιν θυσιαστήριον ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ Κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ (AJ 13. 68). A few paragraphs earlier (AJ 13. 64) Isaiah is said to have foretold that a ναὸς would be built in Egypt. Occasionally Josephus mentions a βωμὸς.\(^{27}\) There can be no doubt that both the rabbinic sources and Josephus are speaking about a temple, i.e. a cult place in which sacrifices were performed, not merely a meeting house for prayer and study, i.e. a synagogue.\(^{28}\)

The temple of Onias is known to us as having been located at Leontopolis. Josephus mentions Leontopolis (in the name of Heliopolis), by that name, only in AJ 13. 65, in Onias’ petition addressed to Ptolemy VI Philometor and Cleopatra, and in 13. 70, in the sovereigns’ reply. The other passages in the works of Josephus refer only to the name of Heliopolis without further specification of the place. The repetition of the phrase containing the place-name in the royal reply to the petition simply conforms to what is a natural feature of chancery style, namely to repeat the formulations contained in the original petition. We are thus left with what is, in effect, a single occurrence of the name Leontopolis.\(^{29}\) Now, it is

\(^{23}\) Cf., e.g., PT Yoma 43d.

\(^{24}\) PT Yoma 43d and BT Menahot 109b.

\(^{25}\) E.g. BJ 7. 424, 431 and 432.

\(^{26}\) Above, note 24.


\(^{28}\) Fraser’s repeated references to a “synagogue” at Leontopolis—Tell el-Yahoudiyah ([above, note 21] I 83, II 162–63 nn. 302 and 306) must be due to a lapsus calami; the point is that a synagogue is not a temple: The two serve different functions and have always had a different status from each other. This confusion is found also in the index (but not in the text or in the English original) of the French translation of E. R. Bevan’s *Histoire des Lagides* (Paris 1934) 438. In rabbinic literature I know of only one passage in which it appears that the writer has conflated a synagogue with a temple: In the late ἀντίγραφον τῷ ναῷ τῆς Ἱερουσαλημ (version II), published by A. Jellinek in *Bet ha-Midrasch* (3rd ed., repr. Jerusalem 1967) V 113–16 (see 115 and also [version I] IV 135), the language used is unmistakably conflated with that of the famous description of the great Alexandrian synagogue in Tosefta Sukka 4. 6 et alibi (see below, note 31); the author mentions an altar (in Alexandria) and speaks of sacrifices being performed there.

\(^{29}\) The correspondence quoted by Josephus is generally regarded as a Hellenistic forgery; see Tcherikover (above, note 12) 499 n. 30, who, though for a different purpose and in a different context, rightly notes that even a forged document may contain some kernel of
interesting that those rabbinic sources that do name the location of the Onias temple speak of it as having been located in Alexandria. The Rabbis are certainly not confusing the location of the Alexandria Synagogue with the Alexandria Synagogue which is mentioned elsewhere in talmudic literature; on the contrary, in a number of passages they make it quite clear that they understand that the Onias foundation was a temple, a cult place in which sacrifices were performed, and we even find the opinion expressed that, whatever the status of that temple may have been, it was not an idolatrous temple, and some of the sacrificial acts performed there were, under certain circumstances, to be regarded as valid. It is thus inconceivable that the Rabbis might have confused the temple with the Alexandria Synagogue.

On the other hand, though the possibility of a simple mistake concerning the location of the temple arising from guesswork or ignorance cannot be discounted, it is certainly possible that the Rabbis drew on their own contemporary knowledge that Leontopolis was in the early Byzantine age an alternative designation for Alexandria. The equation Leontopolis = Alexandria lends itself to confusion in both directions.

We are told by Stephanus of Byzantium (fl. probably c. 528–35) that “Alexandria was called Rhakotis, and Pharos, and Leontopolis . . .” Similarly, Eustathius of Thessalonike (12th century) reports that Leontopolis was one of a number of alternative names for Alexandria.

historical truth; thus, the name Leontopolis may well be correct. In any case, there seems to be no doubt about the reliability of the references to the location of the temple in the Heliopolitan nome, and it is generally accepted that the Onias temple was in fact located in the countryside, quite possibly at a place to be identified with the modern Tell el-Yehudiyeh, at a distance of ca. 30 miles NE of Memphis. See R. Marcus on Josephus, AJ 13. 65 (LCL VII 258–59), with the literature there quoted, esp. Schürer (above, note 1) 3rd ed., III (1898) 97 ff. with note 25 (Engl. tr.: III.1 145 f., esp. n. 33).

30 PT Yoma 43d, BT Menahot 109b.
31 Tosetta Sukka 4. 6, BT Sukka 51b, PT Sukka 5. 1 = 55 a–b; cf. S. Krauss, Synagoge Alcibiädes (Berlin–Vienna 1922) 261 ff., 336.
32 See, e.g., Mishna Menahot 13. 10, BT Menahot 109a–b, BT AZ 52b, BT Megilla 10a.
33 RE s.v. “Leontopolis 10” and A. Calderini, Dizionario dei nomi geografici e toponomi dell’Egitto greco-romano I (Cairo 1935) 58.
34 Stephanus Byzantii Ethnicorum quae supersunt ex recensione Augusti Meinekii I (Berlin 1849; repr. 1958) 70: ‘Αλεξάνδρεια πόλεως ὄριοι, κατασκευαστήκη πρώτη ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ ἢ τοις Λίβυσσοι, ὃς οἱ πολιοὶ, ἀπὸ Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ Φιλίππου. ἑκάστως δὲ ὁ τῶν βιῶν τῆς Ἐλλάδος γράφας ἐν δ’ βιβλίῳ φησὶν τὸν μὲν τόπον τῆς πόλεως διὰ τὸ ἀναγνωρισθῆναι εὐτυχῶς

νῆσος ἐπειτὰ τὰς ἐστὶ πολυκλύστρον ἐν πόντῳ

Αἰγύπτου προπόρουθε, Φάρον δὲ ἐκ κυκλησκούσιν.

(Homer, Od. 4. 354 f.)

ἔκλεισε δὲ διαγράφειν τὸ σχῆμα τούς ἠρχιτέκτονας· οὐκ ἔχοντες δὲ λευκήν τῆς ἀλφίτους διέγραφον, ὅρνιθες δὲ καταπάντας τὰ ἀλφίτα αἰνίν ὁρμασαν. ταραξθεὶς οὖν Ἀλεξάνδρος (sic) οἱ μάντες θαρρεῖν ἔθεον· πάντων γὰρ τὴν πόλιν τρόφων γενήσεται.”

taute kai Άρριανος. ἐκλήθη δὲ Ἡρακλίως καὶ Φάρος καὶ Δεοντόπολις διὰ τὸ τὴν τῆς Ὁλυμπιάδος καστέρα ἑσφραγίσθαι λέοντος εἰκόνι. Cf. Appian, Anab. 3. 1–2, Plut. Alex. 2.
Eustathius clearly draws, directly or indirectly, on Stephanus of Byzantium (or his source?). It is thus evident that we have here not two testimonia but what is in fact one. Such papyrological evidence as we have consists of the single letter lambda in a fourth-century papyrus, where we read εις την Ἀλεξάνδρειαν ἢτοι Λ[εοντόπολιν]. It is manifest that this reading of the papyrus, so far from establishing or confirming the identification of Alexandria with Leontopolis, is itself based on that identification.

The evidence for the alternative name of the great city is thus seen to be extremely meagre; but if the Rabbis indeed confused Alexandria with Leontopolis this very confusion, though leading them into error, would paradoxically enable us to see in it a further piece of evidence, both for the use of Leontopolis as an alternative name for Alexandria and for the placing of the Oniad temple in Leontopolis (the latter, as we have seen, attested otherwise only by Josephus, AJ 13. 65–70). Since our Greek evidence is so poor on both these points any additional evidence from rabbinic sources is to be welcomed, more especially as our talmudic texts are completely independent of the Byzantine tradition. We must, of course, remember that neither the Jerusalem Temple nor that of Onias at Leontopolis existed any longer at the time the Rabbis discussed the sacrifices performed there. Their discussions are thus purely academic, and though they will have been nourished by plentiful and zealously preserved information about the activities of the Jerusalem priesthood, they cannot have drawn on more than scattered memories of the Oniad foundation. Hence, since in their period Leontopolis was known to be an alternative name for Alexandria, the great city with its vastly numerous Jewish population, any fleeting memory of the name Leontopolis in connexion with the temple of Onias, or any mention in

4–5. My colleague Dr. Deborah Gera has reminded me of Herodotus 6. 131, where a somewhat similar motif occurs in a story concerning the mother of Peneile; cf. Plut. Per. 3. 2.

Eustathius (C. Müller [ed.], Geographi Graeci Minores II [Paris 1882] 261) writes on the words Μακεδόνιον πτολεμιδρον (which appear in the text of Dionysius Periegetes, line 254 = Geographi Graeci Minores II 116): δ ἐστιν η τοῦ Μακεδόνος Ἀλεξάνδρου ὁμόσπον ἰσός, ἐν η καὶ ἐπάθη . . . ἀριθμοῦται δὲ ἐν ταῖς ἱστορίαις Ἀλεξάνδρεια υπὲρ τὰς δεκακοταὶ τούτων μὲν καὶ αὐτὴ, πόλις Λίβυσσα ἢτοι Λιγυπτία. ταύτην δὲ καὶ ἄλλοις μὲν ὄνομασι διαφόροις κληθήναι φασὶ ποτὲ, ὀνομασθῆναι δὲ καὶ λεοντόπολιν διὰ τὸν τῆς Ὀλυμπιάδος καὶ τούτο Ἀλεξάνδρον (?), ἡ γὰρ ἄρα ἐνεργηθηκαίτο λέοντος εἰκὸνα λέγεται, κ.τ.λ. For the possible sources of Stephanus, for the question why the great city was called Leontopolis, and for related matters, see C. Müller (ed.), Pseudo-Calisthenes (Paris 1865) xix f., with notes; also C. Müller (ed.), Scripiores Alexandri Magni (Paris 1865) 160 (Jason Argivus, fr. 2).

35 We have only an epitome, dating from between the sixth and the tenth centuries, of the Ethnica; it has been suggested (J. F. Lockwood in OCD s.v. “Eustathius”) that Eustathius may in fact draw in his commentary on the complete text of Stephanus. R. Browning in the same work (2nd ed., p. 1012) suggests that Eustathius used the surviving epitome of the Ethnica.


37 The reading Λ[εοντόπολιν], though attractive and quite possibly right, does not by necessity impose itself and is not universally accepted: see P. J. Sijpesteijn, “Notes on Two Papyri,” ZPE 87 (1991) 257–58, who suggests εἰς την Ἀλεξάνδρειαν ἢτοι λ[εοντόπολιν τοῦ Εὐνόστου].
some recondite source of the location of that temple in that place, could
easily explain the confusion—but only if the temple was really located in
Leontopolis.

There are further facts to be considered: Leontopolis was located in the
Heliopolitan nome. By a curious and in itself unremarkable coincidence the
city of Heliopolis (in Hebrew called צדק)\(^{38}\) bore the Egyptian name Ḥwntw. It
is manifest that to the eyes and ears of users of Aramaic or Hebrew this
would constitute an irresistible invitation to confuse the Egyptian name with
the Semitic name for “Greek” or “Greece,” Ḥwnt, which itself was sometimes
confused with Alexandria: See the passages cited below from Tosefta
Nidda 4. 17 and BT Nidda 30b.

The Hebrew/Jewish Aramaic/Syriac (ר) işaret, like the Greek
Ἀλεξάνδρεια and the Latin Alexandria (ia), can refer to towns other than
the great city: Thus, e.g., an Egyptian city called Κ', mentioned a number
of times in the Hebrew Bible,\(^{39}\) is generally identified by the Septuagint
translators with Diospolis (Thebes in Upper Egypt). Some rabbinic sources

\(^{38}\) Gen. 41. 45, 41. 50, 46. 20. Cf. also Ez. 30. 17, where the vocalization is different, but
see Symmachus and Theodotion for the Greek transcription Αיוυ. (The Septuagint has
“Heliopolis.”)

\(^{39}\) Jer. 46. 25: Hebr. קד(א); for LXX, see Jer. 26. 25; Syr. קְרֵי(א)! It may be of interest
that in Ez. 30. 17 צדק the LXX has νεανίσκου Ἡλεοῦ πόλεως. The vocalization of
צדק need not detain us here; but it is noteworthy that the Peshitta translates קְרֵי לַדְרֵך
הָרוֹם. My colleague Professor Jonas Greenfield has pointed out to me that the
Peshitta reading קד in Ez. 30. 17 may be due to a misreading of the Hebrew שְׂמֵר י, the last
word in the preceding verse (left untranslated there). Ez. 30. 14: Hebr. קד(ב); LXX
Διόσπολις; Syr. ד(ב). Ez. 30. 15: Hebr. קד LXX מִמָּוְכָ; Syr. מ(א). Ez. 30. 16: Hebr.
קד(א); LXX Διόσπολις; Syr. ד(א). Nah. 3. 8: Hebr. צדק קד(א); LXX Αμων; Syr. (ג) וְאֶל
קִדרֵך

See also the citations in R. Payne Smith, Thesaurus Syriacus I (Oxford 1879) s.v. צדק
שומם, coll. 1579–80 (from medieval Syriac-Arabic lexicographers): e.g., צדתק
אָמַר וּתְרוּ. (The reference is clearly to our
passage in Nah. 3. 8.) For other identifications with Alexandria, see ibid. מִמוֹכָ מ in Ez. 30.
15 seems to be based on the reading ד (instead of the masoretic קד), borrowed from 30. 13
(Hebr. קד וּתְרוּ Syr. יְמְמֶדָת קד), which is translated there by מִמָּוְכָ (LXX). The LXX translation
in Nah. 3. 8 is, of course, no more than a transcription of the second part of the double name in
the Hebrew Vorlage. It is to be noted that rabbinic sources understand the reference in Nah. 3.
8 too be to Alexandria (see Pesikta Rabbati 156b, cited below). Note also that extra-
septuagintal Greek translators did not hesitate to transcribe the Hebrew name קד in one way or
another rather than to give a Greek equivalent for it: נו (Symmachus in Ez. 30. 14, 15), נוצ
(Theodotion, ibid.), נו (Aquila in Ez. 30. 15); compare also Aquila: Βασίλειος for קד(ב) in Ez.
30. 14. (The place-name מִמָּוְכָ stands variously for קד, קד or קד in the Septuagint; for
eamples see Supplement to Hatch and Redpath, Concordance to the Septuagint 112b, s.v.
מִמָּוְכָ.)
on the other hand identify אֶלֶבֶסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה אֲלָבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה = Alexandria: אֲלָבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה אֲלָבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה.

Both the Greek and the Syriac traditions have preserved the memory of the multiplicity of places called Alexandria: Stephanus of Byzantium (above, note 34): 'Ἀλεξάνδρεια πόλεως ὀκτώκοιδεκα (cf. Eustathius of Thessalonike [above, note 34]: ... ἀρίθμονται δὲ ἐν ταῖς ἱστορίαις Ἀλεξάνδρεια υπὲρ τὰς δεκακοτών). For Syriac, see Payne Smith, col. 209, s.v. אֲלָבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה אֲלָבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה for two towns called Alexandria: אֲלָבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה אֲלָבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה = Alexandria, אֲלָבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה אֲלָבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה = Alexandretta (Iskenderun).

It is also the case that, occasionally, Alexandria, in Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic (both Jewish and Christian), may refer to the whole land of Egypt, or, rather, may stand for it, pars pro toto. Thus, Payne Smith (ibid.) also cites the use in Syriac of the name Alexandria pro tota Aegypto. Similarly, in Lamentations Rabba 1. 5. 246 (p. 65 Buber) it seems easy to understand דאֵלְבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה אֲלָבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה אֲלָבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה דאֵלְבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה as referring to the commander of the troops from Egypt as a whole and not only of those from Alexandria. So also, one may want to read in Tosefta Nidda 4. 17 דאֵלְבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה אֲלָבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה אֲלָבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה דאֵלְבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה דאֵלְבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה instead of דאֵלְבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה אֲלָבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה or of דאֵלְבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה אֲלָבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה in the parallel passages (both in BT Nidda 30b: דאֵלְבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה אֲלָבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה דאֵלְבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶּה and, on the same page, דאֵלְבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶּה אֲלָבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶּה דאֵלְבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶּה); or instead of דאֵלְבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶּה אֲלָבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶּה דאֵלְבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶּה as read by Zuckermandel (p. 645).

Note also that Rashi on BT AZ 8b (בִּירֵי הַלֵּפַטְרִים מִלְבַּת אֲלָבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה) writes, citing the passage in BT Nidda 30b, שֶׁאֲלָבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה אֲלָבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה דאֵלְבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶּה. This suggests either the ease with which the place-name Alexandria insinuates itself into such a context or the possibility that Rashi read a text different from that in our printed editions.

But all this does not, in the end, affect our problem: One is not surprised that Alexandria may, as is so often the case elsewhere, stand for the country of which it is the chief city; nor that its name may be applied confusedly and thus wrongly, because of the great number of places that bear the same name. What is argued here is simply that the confusion that we are dealing with is of a peculiar kind, namely that occasionally the name Alexandria, in our rabbinic sources, comes in place of another name which

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40 See Pesikta 63b, with Buber's note ad loc., Pesikta Rabbati, cap. 17, p. 87a and see also p. 156b (Friedmann—[Ish Shalom]), Gen. R. 1. 1 (p. 1 Theodor/Albeck), Targum to Ezekiel 30. 14–16, Targum to Jeremiah 46. 25, Targum to Nahum 3. 8.

41 RE has twenty-one entries for places called Alexandria.

42 Such confusions are easy in our sources: Thus in Seder Olam Rabba some editions are said (see Krauss, Lehnwörter I 55, s.v. אֲלָבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה) to have in chapter 30 the spelling אֲלָבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה for the proper name אֲלָבָסְטֶרְדֶּרֶטֶּה.

43 Cf., in Arabic, Mission for Egypt and also for its capital; similarly al-Shām for Syria and its capital. See also Syriac מִסְרָא, which is used both for the whole of Egypt and for any city which may at any given time be its capital, e.g. Fustat (Old Cairo) or Alexandria.
is itself, in the early Byzantine age, an alternative name of the Ptolemaic capital.

Considered by themselves the points made here are small and perhaps insignificant. Nonetheless, if I am right in suggesting that the confusion of the Rabbis arose out of the fact that Alexandria was also called, in their time, Leontopolis, this would make it unnecessary to suspect the Rabbis of completely uninformed guesswork. This alone would be a conclusion of some value. But there is more: If the suggestion made here is indeed acceptable, then this would add strength to the confidence with which we expect to find in the recesses of rabbinic literature a good deal more such material. Handled with discretion and discrimination, this is likely to provide confirmation and corroboration of what we learn otherwise only through remarks dispersed here and there over pagan and Christian writings of antiquity and the early Byzantine age.

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