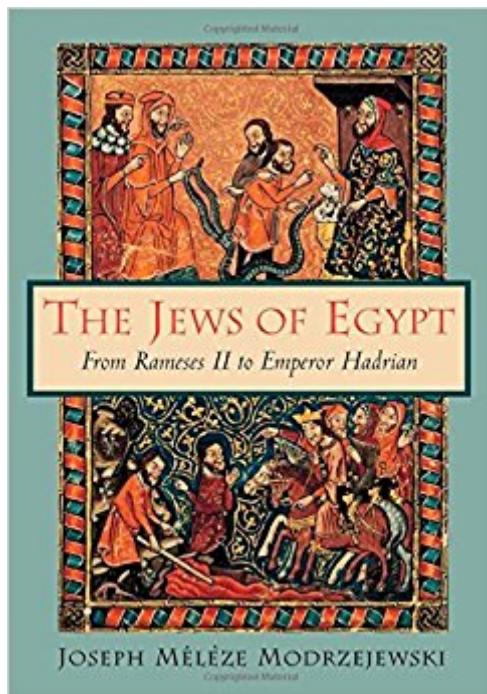


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The Jews Of Egypt



Synopsis

Hellenistic Egypt was the setting for perhaps the first Jewish Golden Age, a time "golden" in Jewish memory as an era of vibrant cultural interaction between the Jews and their gentile hosts. This is the story of the adventures and misadventures of the people of Israel in the land of Egypt the years shrouded in the mists of biblical history under the Pharaohs; the strange intermezzo of the Jewish mercenary detachment on the island of Elephantine on the upper Nile; the apogee of Jewish culture under Ptolemies; and finally, the Jewish community's rapid decline and catastrophic disappearance under Roman rule. Joseph Modrzejewski uses scientific analysis to illuminate the reality underlying our image of the past. The biblical accounts and Jewish and pagan literary texts are juxtaposed with discoveries of a century of archaeological and papyrological research that has unearthed the edicts of emperors as well as the humble correspondence of common people. In a tantalizing epilogue, Modrzejewski probes a turning point in Western civilization: the brief but crucial episode when budding Christianity and the Alexandrian Jews parted company.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Urbane, intelligent, and well-researched . . . more than ample for a well-rounded view of Jewish history in ancient Egypt."--Library Journal

Text: English (translation) Original Language: French

While in the processing of writing a novel focused on religious developments in Alexandria, Egypt, in

the First Century, I was surprised to discover the size and importance of the Jewish population in that city and in Egypt during that period. Having previously believed that most Jews fled Egypt at the time of Moses and never went back, I went looking for reliable historical material to remedy the misperception. On the informed advice of Dr. Gary Rendsburg, professor of Jewish Studies at Rutgers University, I purchased Joseph Meleze Modrzejewski's *The Jews in Egypt*. At first, its considerable size and complexity appeared to be too much for a subject I was studying "only" for background material. But the easy style and pertinent detail drew me in, and then I stayed for its cogent analysis of the interaction among philosophies and religions, some in decline, others in ascendance, so characteristic of this fabulous Mediterranean city, then the cerebrum of the world with its library and university. A specialty item indeed, but one highly recommended to readers interested in Alexandria as a cultural center and in the Hellenic-Judaic-Christian melding that took place there in the early centuries of the Common Era.

Modrzejewski has written what is likely to be "the" guide to the Jews in Egypt in the Second Temple period. While this may seem to some an obscure undertaking, it is actually essential learning for anyone seeking to understand the matrix of Judaism and Christianity at the turn of the common era. Alexandria was a key locale as events unfolded, but it wasn't the only historically relevant Egyptian place where Jews lived in the Diaspora. Modrzejewski explores Leontopolis, Elephantine and other places where Jews dealt with life in Hellenistic Egypt. Modrzejewski presents a series of fascinating episodes, some in perhaps more detail than some readers need, such as marriage contracts and other documents that support his theses. But this is simply good scholarship: taking the evidence that is available and making the most of it, without overreaching his conclusions. A "must read" for anyone seeking to understand how and why Christianity abandoned its Jewish roots.

A fascinating and well-researched study of Jews in Egypt during the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. It provided easy access to historical data I've never seen in one place before. My only complaint? It was too short!

Although this is a relatively short book, it is filled with interesting information that most people do not know about Jews in Egypt from the time of Rameses II, when Joseph and the Israelites were in Egypt, before the exodus with Moses, until the time of the Roman emperor Hadrian in the early second century, when after the Jews rebelled because of mistreatment, the emperor "inflicted a chastisement on the Jews who had risen in revolt." The Jewish community was deprived "of their

homes and their land and could no longer form a nucleus for a possible reconstruction."Interestingly, earlier, the Jews thrived in Egypt and even had a sanctuary in Leontopolis. In the mid-second century BCE, around 172 BCE, Onias IV, who was a descendant of Zadok, high priest in the time of Solomon, fled to Egypt. Jason Ḥaṭṭaṭ, the Hellenist, the brother of Onias III, usurped the role of the High Priesthood from Onias III. The latter took refuge in a pagan temple in Daphne, near Antioch, but was assassinated by order of another Hellenist, Menelaus, Jason's successor as high priest. Around this time, the precise date is uncertain, Onias III's son, Onias IV, fled to safety in Egypt. By 164 BCE, Onias IV was a high dignitary in the Ptolemaic court. He constructed a Jewish temple in Egypt sometime between 167 and 164. Josephus tells us that after the fall of Masada in Israel, in 73 CE, some fighters escaped the disaster and took refuge in Egypt. They attempted to foment a revolutionary movement among the Jews. The then emperor of Rome, Vespasian, ordered the demolition of the Leontopolis temple in 74 CE because Rome saw it as a dangerous symbol of the independence of the Jewish people. Thus, this temple lasted about 240 years.

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