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SUMMARY OF PhD DISSERTATION

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THE JEWS OF PTOLEMAIC EGYPT IN THE LIGHT OF THE PAPYRI

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I. TOPIC OF THE DISSERTATION:

The subject of the thesis is the Jews of Ptolemaic Egypt in the light of papyrological sources. For such a study it is necessary to use or compile a papyrus corpus related to Jews and Judaism in Egypt. The first attempt to collect all the published and then known Jewish papyri and ostraca from Egypt was the still usable and indispensable Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum I-III edited by V. A. Tcherikover, A. Fuks and M. Stern, and published between 1957 and 1964.¹ The first volume of this corpus contains papyri and ostraca from the Ptolemaic period (332-30 BCE), the second volume those from the Early Roman period (30 BCE-117 CE), and the third volume those from the Late Roman and the Byzantine period (117-642 CE). It is important to emphasize that Tcherikover and his co-editors collected only Greek documentary sources, i.e. they took neither Greek literary sources nor non-Greek material into consideration.

To write an up-to-date study on the Jews of Ptolemaic Egypt involving all the available sources, it was necessary to collect the new material that could not have been known to the editors of the CPJ. The main difference between the methodology of CPJ I and that of my corpus of Jewish papyri is that I included non-Greek material too: besides the Greek papyri and ostraca, there are several Aramaic and Demotic sources that are available to us. In my view it is important to take them into account because they contribute to a multicoloured picture of the Jews of Egypt.

When compiling a collection of papyri, one needs to follow a system of criteria. The main concern of the CPJ editors was to decide how to distinguish between “Jewish” and “non-Jewish” papyri. What makes a papyrus “Jewish”? Because of the relevance of the issue, I quote the criteria that were employed by the editors of the CPJ. The following papyri were considered “Jewish:”

1. Papyri and ostraca in which the word Ἰουδαίος or Ἑβραῖος appears.
2. Papyri and ostraca in which technical terms such as προσευχή or σάββαθα are attested, because they point to Jews or Judaism.
3. Papyri and ostraca originating from places that were known as exclusively Jewish settlements, for instance the Roman-period Jewish quarter of Edfu.
4. Papyri and ostraca containing Jewish names.

When selecting the new material, I mostly followed these criteria, but sometimes I was more rigorous, especially in case of the third and fourth criteria. Concerning the third criterion, it must be noted that we do not know of any settlement that was exclusively inhabited by Jews in the Ptolemaic period. Moreover, in case of several papyri that were acquired by purchase, we simply do not know their provenance. Therefore, in my view, this criterion is difficult when looking for Jewish papyri. The fourth criterion is also problematic. Names as such will always remain the most uncertain criterion of identifying Jews, and yet, this is our commonest method in our research, since in several cases the sources do not refer to the ethnic origin of the people mentioned. Only a Hebrew name can be considered an unquestionable indicator of Jewishness. However, Jews carried not only Hebrew names, but also common Semitic, Greek and even Egyptian names in Ptolemaic Egypt. Any of these

names should be treated with reservation as has also been done by the editors of the CPJ. Some instances enumerated by V. A. Tcherikover: 2 Ὀνής is not a variant of Ὀνίας (Ωνίας) but an Egyptian name (Hwn), Ἀρων is not the biblical Ἀρων (יהוה) but the hypocoristic form of Grecized Egyptian names beginning with Ἀρ, and the names Σαλαμών or Μάλχος are not specifically Hebrew names but common Semitic names. People bearing such names are excluded from CPJ unless they are explicitly stated to be Jews.

In the case of Greek names, the criteria are, however, less rigid. Although Tcherikover notes that the theophoric Greek names should be treated with caution, he has accepted the Jewishness of Greek-named persons in the following cases: 3

1. When both father and son bear theophoric names.
2. When there are at least two or three people bearing theophoric or other uncertain (for instance common Semitic) names in the same document.
3. When the papyrus containing a theophoric name comes from a “place known as an important center of Jewish settlement.”
4. When the papyrus is dated to a period when the given theophoric name was preferred by Jews.

Besides, according to Tcherikover, the name Dositheos was an almost exclusively Jewish name. As a result of these criteria, several documents are included in the CPJ based on Greek theophoric names, occasionally in association with common Semitic names. It is true that the presence of two or three uncertainly Jewish names in the same text increases the probability of their Jewishness, but it still remains uncertain.

In my view, one needs to be even more cautious when distinguishing between “Jewish” and “non-Jewish” papyri. In this, I follow T. Ilan, who applied a quite rigorous criteria system in her Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity. 4 Persons bearing Greek theophoric names are included in the present corpus only if they were relatives of certainly Jewish persons. In any other case, I have not identified them as Jews. I am aware of the fact that in this way, I may have excluded some texts referring to Jews, but it is more useful to use less, but certainly Jewish texts in our study. Following this system of criteria, I have collected 89 new texts that record Jews or can be linked to Jews or Judaism. These texts together with the CPJ documents constitute the basic material for the present study.

II. STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS AND MAJOR RESULTS:

The thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 offers a general review of the available papyrological sources related to Jews. In order to remain coherent, I have reconsidered all the documents included in CPJ I and classified them either as “Jewish papyri” or as “doubtful Jewish papyri.” The reason why I have chosen this or that category concerning a given text is explained in footnotes. Following this system, I have excluded 54 CPJ documents from further study because their Jewishness is not convincing. Yet, even after

2 Ibid., p. xviii, n. 6.
3 Ibid., p. xix.
removing these texts, there remain 185 papyrological sources at our disposal, which constitutes sufficient material for the study of the Jews in Ptolemaic Egypt. The relevant texts are listed in both chronological and geographical order so that the reader can gain a general view of the sources.

As to the political history of the Jews in Egypt (Chapter 1.1.1.), the Ptolemaic period brought great changes. According to Josephus the emigration of the Jews began already under Alexander himself, while other literary sources ascribe the arrival of the Jews to the reign of Ptolemy I Soter (323-282 BCE). These early events are however not supported by documentary sources. The first documentary sources related to Jews are dated to the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphos (282-246 BCE), when the Egyptian Jewry grew both in number and in importance. This is also clear from the fact that the earliest attestations of ancient synagogues date from the IIIrd century BCE. The Jewish communities of Egypt reached their zenith in the IInd century BCE, undoubtedly under the reign of Ptolemy VI Philometor (180-145 BCE). He was one of the most “philo-semite” kings among the Ptolemies, and Onias’ temple at Leontopolis was also built in this period. They became active participants of the political life as well as loyal supporters of Ptolemy VI and Cleopatra II, and they were granted the right of forming politeuma similarly to other military groups. However, all these also suggest the decline of the royal power, and that the government was in need of these forces. The end of the IInd and the beginning of the Isth century BCE was marked by serious royal struggles, and the Jews continued to participate in the political life, but none of the event related to them are preserved in documentary sources. The same can be said in general for the Isth century BCE. It is striking how few sources (10 texts) are at our disposal from the Isth century BCE. This under-representation of the Jews during the last century of the Ptolemaic rule does not reflect the real situation since there is no reason to suppose that their number decreased at that time.

As to the geographical distribution of Jewish papyri (Chapter 1.2.1.), it is undoubted that most of the sources come from the Fayum, but Thebes and Edfu also yielded several ostraca. The center of the Egyptian Jews was certainly Alexandria, which is, however, very poorly documented. Most of the Jewish settlements concentrated in the Nile Delta and in the Fayum. Based on the new material, it has become clear that both Herakleopolis and Edfu had quite large Jewish communities.

Chapter 2 aims to provide a complete overview of the onomastics of the Egyptian Jews on the basis of Tal Ilan’s lexicon as well as on my own research. Since the names constitute our most important method of identifying Jews, this chapter can serve as a good starting point to understand the problems of identification and the general trends of Jewish onomastics too. All in all, I have found 1043 persons who could be regarded as Jews. Of these, 509 (49%) are certainly Jews, either because they are designated so (Ἰουδαῖος/ία) or because they bear biblical names or fulfill another decisive criterion. Yet, more than half of them, i.e. 534 individuals (51%) are problematic, and their Jewishness is questionable. For this study as well as for the final statistics, I have taken into account only the certainly Jewish persons. By examining the names borne by these persons, it becomes possible to see their onomastic practices. The Hellenization and the onomastic assimilation were clearly very fast (Chapter 2.2.). 37% of the names borne by the Jews of Egypt were Greek. The Egyptian environment also influenced the Jewish onomastics, because 4,7% of the names are of
Egyptian origin (Chapter 2.3.). This is not surprising, since Egyptians and Jews lived side by side, and there was an intensive social interaction between them, especially in Upper Egypt. This trend seems to be overwhelmed by the appearance of biblical names, especially those of the great heroes of the Bible (Chapter 2.4.). Their introduction into the onomastic stock in Egypt is surprising given the fact that in Palestine they were not in use at all. These biblical names have one common reference: the Septuagint. The possible influence of the Septuagint on Jewish onomastics in Egypt has already been suggested by S. Honigman in connection with the name Abraham, and our study largely confirms this assumption. The adoption of biblical names in Egypt was due, at least in part, to the desire to show the Jewish identity of their bearers. The Septuagint certainly played an important role in maintaining Jewish identity, and served as a source for the choice of names that expressed the Jewish origin.

Chapter 3 studies the place of the Jews in the Ptolemaic army. The military service and the remuneration system were among the main reasons why the Jews immigrated to Egypt as early as the beginning of the Ptolemaic period. Our corpus broadens the group of documentary sources recording Jewish presence in the Ptolemaic army by several Greek and Aramaic texts, which shed light on the social life of the Jewish soldiers. The life of these soldiers is studied from two different geographical points of view: those settled in Upper Egypt and those settled in Middle and Lower Egypt. In Upper Egypt we have evidence of an Aramaic-speaking community, which constitutes the remains of a Persian-period community (Chapter 3.1.). Although the Aramaic sources related to this community are economic in nature, we can reveal some telling details that may refer to the military character of the community: the settlement was called “Edfu the fortress.” Other details also recall the Vth century BCE Elephantine papyri, thus it seems reasonable to suppose that this community was also organized as a military settlement. In Lower Egypt, most of the Jewish communities consisted of Greek-speaking settlers who arrived in Egypt in the aftermath of the Macedonian conquest (Chapter 3.2.). The Ptolemies established the system of cleruchs (kleruchoi), i.e. military settlers, who received kleroi (plots of land) from the king in return for their military service. Besides the cleruchs, there were also mercenaries (mishphoroi, stratopotai, taktomisthoi), who received wages. However, as a result of the Fourth Syrian War and the battle of Raphia (217 BCE) that brought victory to Ptolemy IV Philopator, the state had to face a serious rebellion in the country, which is why the army underwent serious changes. It became more open, and thousands of native Egyptian soldiers were recruited. These Greco-Egyptian soldiers were not cleruchs but professional soldiers receiving wages for their service. They were called mishphoroi, that is, mercenaries regardless of their ethnic background. Jews were undoubtedly present in the Ptolemaic army, both among the cleruchs and the mercenary soldiers. They did not have a separate ethnic hipparchy, but were scattered in the numbered or mixed hipparchies. We meet several Jews of the Epigone in the sources, who were certainly descendants of foreign soldiers. Some of them entered the army receiving either wages or kleroi, while others may have remained civilian. The sources in general do not reveal their military situation, because they are attested in legal documents. The amount of the loans attested in legal contracts shows, however, that some Jewish epigonoi had a good financial background. The last issue that is studied in this chapter is that of the

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“Macedonians” and “Persians of the Epigone,” which may also designate Jews. Although the use of ethnic designations began to recede in the II\textsuperscript{nd} century BCE, these ethnic designations are still present after the 170s BCE. They became pseudo-ethnic titles connected to the reorganized army. From about 150 BCE the same person could be designated “Persian,” “Persian of the Epigone” and “Macedonian” alternatively, and suddenly we find several authentic Egyptian names among the “Persians.” It seems that “Persian of the Epigone” was the title of the new Greco-Egyptian misthophoroi until they were recruited. Once they became soldiers themselves, their status changed to “Persian” or even “Macedonian,” which was probably the most prestigious title. Their status alternated depending on whether or not they were on active service. Jewish soldiers were not any different from their non-Jewish fellows. They adapted to the Ptolemaic military system, and were present both among the “Persians of the Epigone” and the “Macedonians.”

Chapter 4 continues to tackle social issues, and the focus is on the civil life of the Jews with a special interest in their professions and business affairs. We find Jews among the policemen, the epistatai (chief officials at town- and village-level) as well as the strategoi (chief officials at nome-level). Besides, many Jews are attested in the sources as state officials. The most famous among them was certainly Dositheos son of Drimylos, who became an influential man in the Ptolemaic court and the eponymous priest of the deified Ptolemaic kings. Turning to lower-ranking officials, we must mention the scribes, the collectors of chaff and the tax farmers. The latter were responsible for the collection of different taxes, and we know of at least seven Jewish tax farmers. Other Jews were farmers or land-owners as is well demonstrated by the ostraca from Upper Egypt. One section of this chapter studies the money lending among Egyptian Jews (Chapter 4.3.3.). It is instructive to have a look at how they lent or borrowed money, and how this practice clashed with biblical law. Jewish law, which also served as the nomos politikos of the Jews in Egypt, prohibits any kind of interest given by a Jew to another Jew. Yet, the picture that emerges from the papyri does not seem to be in conformity with biblical law. Among the five loan-business related documents, in which at least one of the parties was Jewish, two loans were given at the regular interest rate of 24% per year, two others were given “without interest” (atokos). This latter has nothing to do with the biblical law, because loans designated “without interest” already included the interest. Thus, Jews simply followed the Hellenistic practice of money lending.

Chapter 5 presents different aspects of Judaism that are recorded in the sources: Sabbath observance, synagogues (Chapter 5.1.). The Sabbath is a fundamental institution of Jewish religious life. It is mentioned several times in the Hebrew Bible, but it was only with the destruction of the first temple (587 BCE) that the importance of the Sabbath increased and was given religious significance. In the Egyptian Diaspora, the Elephantine papyri of the V\textsuperscript{th} century BCE provide the first unambiguous evidence for the observance of the Sabbath, and among the Ptolemaic period sources, there are two instances, where Sabbath observance is traceable (CPJ I 10, PSI Congr. XVII 22). Both texts are economic in nature, and indicate that there was no business transaction on the day of Sabbath. What Sabbath observance entailed exactly is told by literary sources. Philo describes different gatherings that took place in the Alexandrian synagogues, where lessons were held by learnt Jewish teachers, and the people were supposed to sit, keep silent and pay attention to the instructions of the Law. Josephus
also says that the essence of Sabbath observance was not only abstention from work but also the gatherings in their “holy places,” i.e. in the synagogues. As to the synagogues, their origin is highly debated, but the earliest evidence of ancient synagogues comes from Ptolemaic Egypt. At present we know of thirteen synagogues based on documentary and literary sources. The documentary sources are mostly dedicatory inscriptions of synagogues in the Nile Delta and the Fayum. The synagogues were built with the permission of the rulers and they belonged to the same category as the Egyptian and Greek temples. They were also entitled to request the right of asylum. The practices carried out in the synagogues are known from literary sources only, based on which we have to assume that the main function of the synagogues was to give place to the Sabbath gatherings, the study of the Torah, and most probably also served as communal and social institution for the Jews. The second part of this chapter discusses the first signs of “anti-Judaism,” which emerged in Egyptian priestly circles (Chapter 5.2.). The very first author who undoubtedly spoke of the Jews with antipathy, was Manetho, and his followers, Lysimachus, Apion and Chaeremon became the main representatives of the ancient anti-Jewish propaganda. The most interesting and the most powerful propaganda of their writings is undoubtedly the Egyptian story of the Exodus. Although the details are different in each account, the basic story is the same. Clearly, these Exodus stories can be traced back to one common Egyptian origin, which existed well before Ptolemaic times. It was part of their propaganda literature against foreign occupation of the country. The impiety of the foreigners was attributed to the Jews at some point, and it seems reasonable to suppose that the Jews became hateful in the eyes of the Egyptians during the Persian rule, because they did not join them in their struggle against the invaders, but served the Persians. In Egyptians’ eyes, they became collaborators with the Persians, and as such, hated foreigners.

Finally, Chapter 6 is devoted to the study of the Jewish politeuma in Herakleopolis. The publication of this archive constitutes an important contribution to our knowledge about the Jews of Ptolemaic Egypt. It is analyzed from different perspectives (Chapter 6.2.): the Jewishness and the nature of the politeuma, its geographical and social competence, its military and political role, and finally some questions of Jewish identity (Chapter 6.3.). Before the publication of the archive, those scholars who believed in the existence of such an institution were convinced that the politeuma had ensured that Jews be allowed to preserve their identity by letting them use their national law. It was also assumed that the Jews must have been seeking to follow their ancestral law. Apparently, this was not the case. What we see in the papyri is that most of the documents reflect Greek law. Although the petitions of the politeuma archive echo the Septuagint several times (references to ancestral law, ancestral oath, deed of divorce), these references may well have served to enforce the legal reasoning of the petitioners. The main purpose of the Jewish politeuma as of any other ethnic politeumata in the Ptolemaic empire was military and political. The Jewish politeuma in Herakleopolis constituted primarily a military group, whose main task was to defend the strategically important military station of Herakleopolis. From political point of view, it was not a dangerous institution because its power was limited to enforcing administrative and legal measures. From military point of view, however, its importance is certain because it gave some ethnic minorities a reason to remain in Egypt in the service of the Ptolemies. At any rate, the emergence of this unique institution represents how the Ptolemaic state sought to
keep foreign people in its service and, at the same time, politically integrate them. How successful this integration was remains an open question, but the Jews apparently did not find it difficult to play according to the Greek rules as long as their privileged status was protected.

### III. PUBLICATIONS AND CONFERENCE PARTICIPATIONS:

#### 1. Publications:

Zs. Szántó:
- “Le role du pouvoir politique dans l’onomastique des Juifs,” Actes de la journée d’étude intitulée « Les Juifs et le pouvoir politique dans l’Antiquité gréco-romaine » (forthcoming)
- “Ptolemaida bankok és zsidók,” Axis – Vallástörténeti folyóirat (forthcoming)

#### 2. Conferences:

Zs. Szántó:
- May 2012: X. Hungarian Conference of Classical Studies (Piliscsaba):
  Házasság, hozomány, válás – A zsidó házasság kérdései a ptolemaida Egyiptomban [Marriage, dowry, divorce – Questions of Jewish marriage in Ptolemaic Egypt]
- March 2013: Hahn 100 – Non Omnis Moriar Conference (Budapest):
  Noms bibliques, grecs et égyptiens – Étude onomastique des Juifs de l’Égypte hellénistique [Biblical, Greek and Egyptian names – Onomastical study of the Jews in Hellenistic Egypt]
- July 2013: XXVIIth International Congress of Papyrology (Warsaw):
  Contribution à l’onomastique des Juifs de l’Égypte hellénistique [Contribution to the onomastics of the Jews in Hellenistic Egypt]
- November 2013: Jews and Political Power in Greco-Roman Antiquity Conference (Paris):
  *Le role du pouvoir politique dans l’onomastique des Juifs* [The role of political power in Jewish onomastics]

- January 2014: Jews on Papyri from Egypt – CPJ IV workshop and lecture (Berlin):
  *Dositheos son of Drimyllos in Demotic (P.Berol. 3096) and Abraham from Leontopolis (O.Petrie 24)*

- May 2014: XI. Hungarian Conference of Classical Studies (Budapest):
  *Ptolemaida bankok és zsidók* [Ptolemaic banks and the Jews]

- July 2014: European Association of Biblical Studies – Annual Meeting (Vienna):
  *Jews on Demotic Papyri and Ostraca from Egypt*

- October 2014: Croatian-Hungarian PhD Conference (Budapest):
  *The Jewish Temple at Leontopolis*

  *CPR XVIII 7, 8, 9 and 11. A Jewish family in Ptolemaic Fayum*

- July 2015: European Association of Biblical Studies – Annual Meeting (Cordoba):
  *P. Amherst 63 col. 12[13]: A Hebrew and Aramaic Hymn in Demotic Script*

- May 2016: XII. Hungarian Conference of Classical Studies (Debrecen):
  *Shabtai Egyptomban, avagy két kultúra találkozása* [Shabtai in Egypt or the meeting of two cultures]