

## Pity and Emotion in Josephus's Reading of Joseph

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Pity must be directed toward a harm that is not deserved, following Aristotle (*Rhet.* 2.8, 1385b.13–16). In her analysis of Josephus's construction of pity in his paraphrase of Genesis, Françoise Mirguet demonstrates how this principle is exemplified in Josephus's account of Judah's appeal to Joseph to release Benjamin for the sake of their father, Jacob (*Ant.* 2.140–59; cf. Gen. 44:18–34). Here, Judah's speech endorses the view that only the innocent (the brothers' father, Jacob) deserves pity and that this should outweigh the punishment justly deserved by the brothers: that Joseph "graciously give [χάρισμα] to our father" what justice demands for the brothers' wrongdoing, and that he "let pity for [Jacob] be more powerful (δυνηθήτω ... ἔλεος) than our wickedness" (*Ant.* 2.151). In what follows, I suggest that Judah's appeal, as constructed by Josephus, is interesting also in other ways for thinking about the significance of pity and the subversion of its construction in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*.

*Questions of guilt, pity, and power* are not straightforward in Josephus's account of Judah's appeal. While Joseph demands punishment only of Benjamin (framed for stealing Joseph's cup), it is Judah who insists that the brothers' collective punishment is "just" (*Ant.* 2.140, interpreting Gen 44:10, 16; cf. 2.155).<sup>1</sup> And it is Judah, according to Josephus, who argues that the brothers' appeal for clemency is not based on their pitying (ἐλεοῦντες) *themselves* but is because *they* have compassion (οἰκτεῖροντες) on their father's old age (*Ant.* 2.148).<sup>2</sup> While appealing to Joseph's

<sup>1</sup>The same point is made by Reuben: *Ant.* 2.107, interpreting Gen 42:22.

<sup>2</sup>Judah's words also imply that pity might be expected (though not by themselves) for the brothers, on account of their youth (*Ant.* 2.148; cf. 2.156, of Benjamin; and, in other contexts, *Ant.* 6.138; 10.202; 14.480).

power, Judah aims to influence, even to control that power by defining what is just vis-à-vis guilt and pity.

*Judah's appeal to reason.* In his epitaph for Joseph, Josephus praises the patriarch for his extraordinary virtue; he is to be remembered as a man who controlled everything by the use of "reason," using his authority sparingly (*Ant.* 2.198). The appeal to Joseph as a man of *reason* also plays a major part in Josephus's account of Judah's appeal. Just before the appeal begins, Joseph rejects the brothers' offer to put themselves forward for punishment in place of Benjamin: it is not "reasonable" (σώφρων), argues Joseph, to release Benjamin for the sake of those who have done nothing wrong, nor to punish them together with Benjamin, the only one of the brothers to be convicted of stealing Joseph's cup (*Ant.* 2.138). This statement represents a significant expansion of Gen 44:17, in which Joseph rejects outright Judah's offer to have all the brothers submit to punishment. Against this background, Josephus makes Judah appeal to Joseph's reasoning powers (λογισμός) (*Ant.* 2.151; cf. 157) to persuade him of the grounds on which he should grant pity. Judah begins by appealing to Joseph's superiority in *virtue*: to his "goodness" (χρηστότης) (2.140; cf. 157); to his superiority over lesser men in following "virtue" instead of "wrath"; to be "high-minded" (μεγαλόφρων), not mastered by wrath (2.141); to continue the gracious generosity and benefactions that had saved the brothers' lives up to now (2.142–57).<sup>3</sup> These are the virtues expected of a king, a thought perhaps directly inspired by Judah's opening words to Joseph, "Be not impatient with your servant, you who are the equal of Pharaoh" (Gen 44:18 JPS). This is a God-given opportunity for Joseph to show himself the best kind of ruler; by exercising his authority as a "humane" (φιλόανθρωπος) leader, Joseph's superiority is distinguished by extending his humaneness even to those who deserve the severest punishment (*Ant.* 2.145–46). In this respect, Josephus reflects a principle encapsulated within Greek-speaking Jewish tradition in the *Letter of Aristeas*. As a fundamental witness to the ideology of kingship in the Hellenistic world, *Aristeas* offers abundant advice—mediated by the fictional dialogue of King Ptolemy II Philadelphus with representatives of Jewish wisdom—including the idea that to grant "pity" is the work of the best kings. Thus, to the question posed by Ptolemy, "How might [the king] be humane [φιλόανθρωπος]?" the Jewish sage responds:

By observing that the race of man comes to maturity and even to birth at the cost of much time and suffering; one must therefore not punish men on slight provocation nor inflict injuries upon them, realizing that human life is comprised of pains and penalties. Taking all things into consideration, then, you will turn to mercy [πρὸς τὸν ἔλεον], for God too is merciful [ἐλεήμων]. (*Let. Aris.* §208)<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup>For terms expressing the idea of gracious favor in this section, see ἐχαρίσω (*Ant.* 2.142), εὐεργεσία (2.143), χάρις (143, 153), χαρίζομενος (147, 151, 157), χάρισαι (151).

<sup>4</sup>Moses Hadas, *Aristeas to Philocrates: Letter of Aristeas* (Jewish Apocryphal Literature; New York: Published for the Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning by Harper and Brothers, 1951), 181–82.

Josephus endorses the same principle in his portraits of Israelite kings and, indeed, in his own depiction of Ptolemy II Philadelphus as exercising “pity” in releasing Jewish slaves in the Ptolemaic kingdom of Egypt.<sup>5</sup>

*The model of divine pity and compassion.* Returning to Judah’s appeal to Joseph, it is the prerogative of the ruler to show pity in such cases, but it is also, as Josephus’s account of the speech makes explicit, an attribute of God’s nature to do so (*Ant.* 2.146). The appeal to pity is rooted not only in the thought of Jacob’s undeserved suffering, vividly conjured up by Josephus on the basis of Genesis 44, but also in piety: in showing pity (ὀϊκτον λαβών) toward the brothers’ father, Joseph will demonstrate his piety toward God (*Ant.* 2.152). Though he has the power to take God-given life, Judah argues, it is for Joseph to give (δοῦναι) and to match God in kindness (χάρις) by saving the guilty (indeed, as many as possible of them), not by destroying them (2.153). Josephus’s emphasis on God as the model of compassion in this context points to several influences. That God should be merciful toward Benjamin, on whose fate rests that of Jacob, is Joseph’s expressed wish in his first encounter with Benjamin in Egypt: “May God be gracious to you” (Gen 43:29; cf. LXX ὁ θεὸς ἐλέησαι σε); in Josephus’s version of the same meeting, Joseph affirms God’s universal care, “that God presides [προστάτης] over all” (*Ant.* 2.122). The power to grant pity, then, is ultimately a power that belongs to God, the universal ruler.

In the wider context of the Pentateuch, the idea of God as merciful to all, including sinners, is fundamental.<sup>6</sup> The way in which this is expressed in the Greek Pentateuch may have shaped what Josephus says about pity in Judah’s speech.<sup>7</sup> We may compare to the language of “pity” employed by Josephus in Judah’s speech (ἐλεοῦντες, οὐκ εἰρόντες, ἔλεος), terms highlighted in Mirguet’s analysis, the

<sup>5</sup>Josephus’s depictions of Israelite kings include, for example, that of Saul as corrupted by power and showing no pity for infants or children (*Ant.* 6.262–68), and that of David as a merciful king who forgave wrongs done to him and spared his enemy (*Ant.* 7.265; cf. 2 Sam 19:23). On Ptolemy II Philadelphus as granting pity to the Jews of Egypt and release from their enslavement, see Josephus, *Ant.* 12.30, interpreting *Let. Aris.* §§22–25. See also the valuable comments of Tessa Rajak on Josephus’s construction of the emperor Titus: “by making compassion (tempered with firmness) into one of Titus’s principal attributes, Josephus was ascribing to him what was the monarch’s virtue *par excellence*” (*Josephus: The Historian and His Society* [2nd ed.; London: Duckworth, 2002], 212).

<sup>6</sup>See, for example, Josephus’s statements about God by nature exercising “pity” (ἔλεος) as the motive for humans showing “pity” in Mosaic laws dealing with the care of the destitute (*Ant.* 4.239, on which see Mirguet’s analysis in this volume; 4.269), or as the motive for pleas for God’s compassion (ὀϊκτος, *Ant.* 1.188; 2.211; 4.40).

<sup>7</sup>On Josephus’s knowledge and use of the Greek Bible, see Tessa Rajak, *Translation and Survival: The Greek Bible of the Ancient Jewish Diaspora* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 252–54, esp. 253: “It is implausible that [Josephus’s] use of the Greek will have been other than direct.”

self-revelation of Israel's God as mediated in Greek Exodus: "the God who is compassionate and merciful [οἰκτιρῶν καὶ ἐλεήμων], long suffering and very merciful [πολυέλεος] and truthful, and ... exercising mercy [ποιῶν ἔλεος] toward the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquities" (LXX Exod 34:6-7).<sup>8</sup>

*Philo's Joseph* is perhaps a further influence on Josephus's construction of pity in Judah's encounter with Joseph. Other kinds of connections have been made in previous studies of the relationship between the Joseph of Josephus's *Antiquities* and the slightly earlier construction of Joseph in Philo's life of the patriarch, *On Joseph* (*Ios.*).<sup>9</sup> Here, as in many other contexts, Josephus may have known and drawn on Philo's interpretation of the Pentateuch.<sup>10</sup> As in Josephus, so too in Philo, the treatment of Joseph's reconciliation with his brothers emphasizes the appeal to pity in Judah's speech: thus, Judah begs Joseph not to yield to wrath (*Ios.* 222); "to have compassion [οἶκτον λαβεῖν]" for the aged Jacob (227); "to take pity [ἔλεος] ... on the old age of a man who has labored throughout his life in the ordeals of virtue" (230).

*Josephus's Joseph and emotion*: Mirguet's analysis of Josephus's *Antiquities* opens up a rich resource for the study of emotion in which, as she puts it, Josephus "often enriches the emotional life of his characters," creating "an omnipresence of emotions" (p. 841). Her study proves this very well. And yet, in the case of the figure of Joseph, the picture is curiously rather different. Emotions are prominent in the Genesis narrative of the reunion of Joseph and his brothers and father (Genesis 42-50). Joseph weeps throughout: at their first meeting, on overhearing the brothers admit their guilt for the loss of Joseph, he turns away and weeps (Gen 42:24); on meeting Benjamin, Joseph runs from the room to break down (43:29-30); on hearing Judah's appeal, Joseph's sobs are so loud they can be heard in the palace (45:1-2); Joseph embraces and weeps on all his brothers (45:14-15); Joseph weeps over his father Jacob, on meeting him, and on his death (46:29; 50:1); and, finally, as the brothers tell Joseph of their late father's plea that Joseph forgive his brothers for all their wrongs against him, Joseph weeps again: he "was in tears as they spoke to him" (50:15-17).

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Exod 33:19, καὶ ἐλεήσω ὃν ἂν ἐλεῶ, καὶ οἰκτιρήσω ὃν ἂν οἰκτιρῶ; and Deut 4:31, θεὸς οἰκτιρῶν κύριος ὁ θεός σου. Among the many LXX parallels to the presentation of the divine nature as οἰκτιρῶν καὶ ἐλεήμων (Exod 34:6), see 2 Chr 30:9; 2 Esdr 19:17, 31; 1 Macc 3:44; multiple examples in the Psalms (esp. Pss 85:15; 102:8; 144:8); Sir 2:11; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; etc.

<sup>9</sup>Maren Niehoff, *The Figure of Joseph in Post-Biblical Jewish Literature* (AGJU 16; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 100: "Philo basically shares Josephus's interpretation of Joseph" (p. 100); see further her analysis, pp. 54-110.

<sup>10</sup>On the likelihood that Josephus knew and used Philo's writings on the interpretation of the Pentateuch, see Gregory E. Sterling, "A Man of the Highest Repute: Did Josephus Know the Writings of Philo?" *Studia Philonica Annual* 25 (2013): 101-14.

Josephus makes Joseph, the man of reason, a figure more in control of his emotions than the Joseph of Genesis.<sup>11</sup> Josephus closely follows Genesis in reporting the tears of emotion wept by Joseph on first meeting his brothers and on being reunited with Benjamin (*Ant.* 2.109, cf. Gen 42:24; *Ant.* 2.123, cf. Gen 43:29–30). In Josephus's version of events, however, this is the end of Joseph's tears. Thus, when Joseph reveals his true identity, there are no tears from Joseph, no loud sobs that penetrate the palace walls (Gen 45:1–2); in Josephus's terms, Joseph is merely "exposed by his emotion" and drops his pretense of anger toward the brothers (*Ant.* 2.160). Following Joseph's speech of forgiveness and reconciliation with the brothers, Joseph embraces them but, contra Gen 45:14, does not weep (*Ant.* 2.166).<sup>12</sup> On being reunited with Joseph, Jacob nearly dies of joy,<sup>13</sup> but Joseph revives him. In this context, toward the end of his story, Josephus makes explicit the contrast between Joseph's self-control and the emotions of others: Joseph, we are told, while unable to master the same emotion of joy, "was not, like his father, overcome by it" (*Ant.* 2.184). Finally, on Jacob's death, nothing is said of Joseph's emotion. In the wider context of the *Antiquities*, such restraint befits Joseph, the man of virtue, who controlled all things by the use of "reason" (*Ant.* 2.198).

<sup>11</sup>See Louis H. Feldman, *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary*, vol. 3, *Judean Antiquities 1–4* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 181 n. 518.

<sup>12</sup>All the brothers except Joseph weep profusely at this point (*Ant.* 2. 166); in Genesis, only Benjamin is said to have wept "on [Joseph's] neck" (Gen 45:14). In Josephus's version of events, the brothers betray more emotion than in the Genesis narrative, and certainly more emotion than Joseph: see, for example, the report of Judah's tears, with no basis in the equivalent passage in Genesis (*Ant.* 2.159).

<sup>13</sup>Presumably, this statement is based on Gen 46:30, "Now I can die, having seen for myself that you are still alive" (JPS); see further Feldman, *Judean Antiquities 1–4*, 181, noting that Josephus "adds greatly to the emotion of the scene."