As nearly as can be determined from the meager textual material under consideration, the
document which H. J. M. Milne labeled the “History of Joseph”\(^1\) seems to be a Jewish
midrashic expansion of a portion of the Book of Genesis.\(^2\) By a comparison of the surviving
fragments of our document with the corresponding biblical text, we may conclude that the
History of Joseph dealt with at least the following matters: the establishment of Joseph by
Pharaoh over Egypt; the gathering of grain before the famine; the coming of the famine and
subsequent dispensation of the grain; the appearance of Joseph’s ten brothers before him to
buy grain; his recognition of them and emotional turning away; his accusing them of
espionage; his inquiry about their family; his brothers’ fear, prayer to God, and attempt to
clear themselves; Joseph’s statement about testing their story; the brothers’ discussion in
jail and Reuben’s statement that their troubles stem from their mistreatment of Joseph; the
return of nine brothers to Canaan; Jacob’s surprise at seeing that one of them was missing
and his inquiry about Simon; the brothers’ explanation of the events which had transpired
in Egypt; and Jacob’s lamentation about losing Simon now as he had lost Joseph before.

Texts

The History of Joseph is partially extant on several Greek papyrus fragments which are
preserved in the British Museum; the Bodleian Library, at Oxford; and the Louvre.
Descriptions and complete transcriptions of the two fragments belonging to the British
Museum have been published in Milne’s *Catalogue of the Literary Papyri in the British
Museum* (pp. 187–90) under numbers 226 and 227 (hereafter referred to as A and B,
respectively). Milne’s transcription has been reproduced in A.-M. Denis’s *Fragmenta
Pseudepigraphorum Quae Supersunt Graeca* (PVTG 3; Leiden, 1970; pp. 235f.). Facsimiles
of A verso and B recto may be found in F. G. Kenyon’s *Greek Papyri in the British
Museum* (London, 1893; vol. 1, pp. 225, 227, under numbers 113 [13a] and 113 [12b],
respectively). These two fragments have been dated by Milne to the sixth or seventh century.

Milne correctly observes that there are two different hands present in A and B, but he
gives the mistaken impression that each of these fragments is written completely in only
one of the two hands. This is, in fact, the case with A, but B contains both of the scripts.
The first thirteen lines of B verso are written in the large, upright uncial hand which is also
that present in A. However, the last four lines of B verso and all of B recto are written in
the smaller, sloping uncial script which is easily distinguishable from the hand of A and B

Although this title perhaps is appropriate for the present fragments, which deal exclusively with the Joseph story, its
applicability for the entire document is questionable, since the extent of the original work is unknown.

\(^2\) For the midrashic character of the HistJos see “Relation to Canonical and Apocryphal Books.” A B seem to
correspond to Gen 41:39–42:36, but C–E are so fragmentary that it is difficult to pinpoint precisely the biblical
context which they represent.
verso 1–13. Thus, we seem to have in B verso an interesting example of a page in which one scribe took over the work of copying a document from another.

Transcriptions of three more papyrus fragments belonging to the History of Joseph and, in all probability, to the same manuscript of this document as A and B have been published by W. M. Lindsay in *The Athenaeum* (Number 3019; Sept. 5, 1885; p. 304). Lindsay’s fragments i. (hereafter C) and ii. (hereafter D) appear to be written in the same hand as that found in B verso 14–17 and all of B recto; Lindsay’s fragment iii. (hereafter E) contains a script which seems to be identical to that of A and B verso 1–13. It is perhaps significant that both Milne, in reference to A and B, and Lindsay, with respect to C, D, and E, report that their fragments were discovered in the Fayum of Egypt. The facts that they are written in the same scripts and have a common place of origin support the possibility that fragments A, B, C, D, and E originally belonged to the same manuscript.

A single unpublished papyrus fragment, which represents a different copy of our document, is preserved in the Louvre under catalogue number E. 7738a (hereafter F). F is written in a hand distinct from those observed in A through E and consists of two originally separate pieces. The smaller fragment, which is long and narrow and from the top of a page, has been joined to the upper left hand corner (recto) of the second piece, which is substantially larger and from the bottom of a page. Although both fragments contain the same script, the manner in which they have been connected is questionable. F, for the most part, does not preserve enough writing to add significantly to the text of our document. However, the verso of this fragment contains some lines which occur also in B recto and can therefore be used to correct and supplement the text of that fragment.

The present translation is based upon the texts of A and B as found in the works of Milne and Denis. Possible corrections of those texts, resulting from a study of photographs4 of A, B, and F will be suggested in the present edition. Of the Bodleian papyri only C contains sufficient context to warrant translation. This will be added after B recto, because C was written by our second scribe, who took over at B verso 14 and subsequently copied all of B recto and probably the following pages. It seems likely, therefore, that C should follow B recto, although it cannot be determined how much text originally separated these two fragments.

**Original language, date, and provenance**

There seems to be no indication that the original language of the History of Joseph is other than Greek. It is perhaps significant that the vocabulary of this document does not appear to be dependent upon that of the Septuagint.

The composition of this work must be placed before the sixth- or seventh-century date of the papyri themselves, given that the two different hands represented in A–E indicate that the manuscript to which these fragments originally belonged was a copy of an older original. However, there seems to be ample reason for ascribing the History of Joseph to a substantially earlier period, especially in view of its parallels with the Targums, Joseph and Asenath, and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (see below).

In the absence of more conclusive evidence, an Egyptian provenance for our document is implied by: (1) the origination of most of its extant fragments5 in the Fayum of Egypt.

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3 That C–E are part of the HistJos is indicated also by the letters kōb in C verso 6, which appear to be part of the name Jacob; by the letters ιθείς ιου лακόβ in D verso 8, which is almost certainly part of the phrase “Joseph remembering Jacob”; and by the letters θείς in E recto 7, which seem to belong to another occurrence of the same phrase. For the significance of this phrase in the HistJos see “Theological Importance.” Further evidence that D E are from our document may be seen at D recto 4 in the letters λακκ. These are probably from the word λακκος (pit), which occurs in the LXX of the Joseph story at Gen 37:20, 22, 24. D verso 6 reads ἀκουστε ὧηοι (listen sons), which also fits the context of the HistJos and probably refers to the “sons of Jacob” (cf. A verso 23, B recto 3). E recto 10 contains the letters ἰφοι, which are probably from adelphoi (brothers) and refer to the brothers of Joseph. It should be noted that there are inaccuracies in Lindsay’s descriptions and transcriptions of the fragments.

4 I would like to express my appreciation to the British Museum, the Louvre, and the Bodleian Library for providing excellent photographs of their fragments and to the International Center on Christian Origins, at Duke University, for making these photographs available to me. I would also like to thank Professor W. H. Willis for his very helpful suggestions concerning the papyri of the HistJos.

5 Details about the acquisition of F are not given by S. de Ricci in “Bulletin papyrologique.” *Revue des études grecques* 15 (1902) 431.
and (2) the concern of at least the surviving portions of text for events which took place principally in Egypt.

**Theological importance**

Of particular importance in the History of Joseph is the obvious attempt by the author to elevate the image of Joseph above that presented in the corresponding biblical text. In what is perhaps the single most significant element in this document, Joseph is referred to as "king of the people" (basileus tou laou) in A recto 16 (cf. A verso 28). Such references to Joseph as king, or ruler, of Egypt are not unknown in Jewish literature of late antiquity. In fact, these titles are commonly attributed to him in chapters 41–42 of Genesis in Targums Onkelos and Pseudo-Jonathan.6

Another example of the exaltation of Joseph in our papyri may be seen in A recto 23 in the words ephanē tropeus. This phrase means that Joseph appeared as, or became, a foster father, or rearer, or, more literally, nourisher of the Egyptians. It is interesting to note that in one Greek inscription of the first century A.D., tropeus signifies "one who gives free meals to the people."7 This interpretation would fit our present context admirably.

Further evidence of this elevation of Joseph in our document may be found in A recto 10, where the singular imperative form of the verb sōzein (to save) occurs. From the context of lines 9–11 it seems entirely possible that at this point in the story Pharaoh could be asking Joseph to save him and Egypt from the coming famine. Support for this reading may be seen later in the biblical narrative (Gen 47:25), where the Egyptian people are described as saying to Joseph, "You have saved our lives . . .".

A final example of the exaltation of Joseph is the occurrence of the phrase "the God of Joseph" in B verso 11 and B recto 9 (cf. A verso 24). The first instance occurs during the conversation between Joseph’s brothers in which Reuben apparently states that the "God of Joseph" has brought misfortune upon them for their having sold Joseph into slavery. The second occurrence of this phrase is in an even more unexpected context. B recto contains the dialogue between Jacob and his nine sons who had returned to Canaan. In line nine it seems that the brothers are asking their father to pray, presumably for the safe release of the imprisoned Simon. That the sons of Jacob would ask their father to entreat thus the "God of Joseph" strongly suggests that our document is concerned with the elevation of Joseph.

Another outstanding characteristic of the History of Joseph is the repeated occurrence in the text of the phrase "Joseph remembering Jacob" (A recto 7, 15, 24; A verso 5, 15; B verso 11?).8 Although no single one of these lines contains all the words of the phrase complete, it would seem that Milne’s restoration in each case of the missing elements is valid. At any rate, the existence of frequent references to Joseph’s remembering Jacob in such a fragmentary text would indicate that this concept could very well be one of the central themes of our document. Perhaps the phrase "Joseph remembering Jacob" provides us with a hint of the situation in which the History of Joseph was written. Such an emphasis upon the remembrance of Joseph’s forefathers could suggest that our document was written in a time of oppression of the Jews, when adherence to their ancestral traditions would be difficult.

**Relation to canonical and apocryphal books**

The extant text of fragments A and B of the History of Joseph follows the biblical narrative of Genesis 41:39–42:36 along general lines but seems to be more an example of midrashic expansion than a mere translation. This may be demonstrated adequately by a

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7 LSJM, p. 1827.
8 See n. 3 for occurrences of "Joseph remembering Jacob" in the Bodleian fragments. It is interesting that in F this phrase is found only at the end of well-defined sections of the text which are set apart from each other by gaps left on the papyrus. This occurs twice on the recto and once on the verso of F and may also be seen at A recto 7. This phenomenon raises the possibility that the HistJos could have been used at some time for liturgical purposes.
The text in Genesis reads as follows: "Returning to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they gave him a full report of what had happened to them." Corresponding to this single biblical verse, our papyrus contains four lines. In B recto 1 it is clear that "they (the brothers) went to Canaan." In line two the verb eskirta (to leap) perhaps refers to some excitement on the part of Jacob—perhaps "his heart leapt." This interpretation is supported by what follows in line two: "and the sight"; line three: "the number of the ten"; and line four: "without one" and "he inquired about." Thus, the History of Joseph expands one biblical verse, which stated merely that the brothers returned to their father and related to him what had happened to them, by adding both the agitation of Jacob at the sight of the nine brothers returning without Simon and Jacob's inquiry about the missing brother.

Apart from this obvious dependence of the History of Joseph upon the Book of Genesis for its basic story line, there are also indications of some relation to such early pseudepigraphical works as Joseph and Asenath and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. It is especially interesting that the three outstanding concepts distinguishable in our papyri of Joseph as king, provider of food, and savior (see above) all occur in a single line of Joseph and Asenath (25:6). The possibility of some affinity between this pseudepigraphon and our document is further strengthened by the occurrence in both of the phrase "God of Joseph" (JosAsen 3:4; 6:4; HistJos B verso 11; B recto 9; A verso 24?). Furthermore, the same sort of elevation of the figure of Joseph, characteristic of the History of Joseph, may be found also in Joseph and Asenath. In the latter work Joseph is described as "the mighty one of God" (3:6; 4:8), "the son of God" (6:2, 6), "the blessed one of the most high God" (8:2), and "the chosen one of God" (13:10).

Finally, yet another important motif of the History of Joseph has a parallel in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. This is the phrase "Joseph remembering Jacob," which as mentioned above is one of the central themes of our document. In the Testament of Joseph 3:3, as Joseph is recounting the story of his temptation by the wife of Potiphar, he states, "I remembered the words of my father, Jacob." The implication in both documents is that Joseph remembered the wise counsels of his father, Jacob, throughout his trials in Egypt and that this enabled him to overcome his misfortune and to rise from prison to an exalted position as "king" of the land of Egypt.

* In this line Joseph is referred to as basileus (king), sitodotēs (giver of grain), and sōtēr (savior).
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HISTORY OF JOSEPH

A VERSO

1. Joseph remembering Jacob? TJos 3:3
2. then they made obeisance[ Gen 42:6
3. they bend unto him the] Gen 42:6
4. the price of the grain, the g[rain? Gen 42:7
5. losantes after the] Gen 42:7
6. bought with silver the . . . of the n[ Gen 42:8
7. not] being recognized by them ka[ TJos 3:3
8. Joseph remembering Ja[cob Gen 42:8
9. [no longer] then containing himself[ Gen 42:24
10. n being absent for a short (time), he left[ Gen 42:24
11. s to his relatives k] Gen 42:24
12. you were seeking ...[to b]uy grain[ Gen 42:10
13. all of you came in order to? Gen 42:12
14. therefore you showed (that) you are . . . and p[ Gen 42:13
15. you have another relative, [_ Gen 42:13
16. émos of the sons of Jacob, k[ Gen 42:11
17. God, now save us G[od of Joseph Gen 42:11
18. land[ enoi the fear for a short[t (time) Gen 42:28
19. to K[ing Joseph: 'Do not be angry, O K[ing Gen 42:10
20. for we[c]ame not to s[lym Gen 42:11
21. édes of the elde[r Gen 42:13
22. both he and w[e Gen 42:13
24. in your[a

B VERSO

1. is before you,[ Gen 42:16,20
2. reton us and s[,] Gen 42:16,20
3. ete are trustworthy, al[,] Gen 42:16,20

a. In the following translation only complete words and phrases have been rendered into English; partial Gk. words have been transliterated and underlined. This translation is relatively free and often does not specify case, gender, or number, because the lack of continuous context does not allow more precision as to the syntactical arrangement of many words. Brackets signify lacunae in the papyrus text and parentheses denote words or letters which have been supplied. Underlined dots indicate unreadable letters. Milne’s question marks, which denote uncertain restorations, have been retained. Gk. high dots have been transcribed into English punctuation as best suits the context. The dots under questionable letters in Milne’s text have been omitted in this translation.

b. Possibly ‘‘truly those . . . me[,]’’

c. Milne’s transcription of this obscure phrase is doubtful because it makes no sense in Gk. Unfortunately, the papyrus is so abraded at this point that it is not possible to suggest a better reading from the photograph. Milne considers the e in rale to be a corrected th, but it seems rather to be an e which has been crossed out.

d. Possibly ‘‘jails.’’

e. Milne’s reading of tichi is doubtful and his correction to teuche (“tools” or “implements”) is not convincing. Again, the abraded state of this section of the papyrus prevents a better reading from the photograph.

f. Lit. ‘‘passe[s] by,’’

g. Or ‘‘at some time.’’
HISTORY OF JOSEPH

A RECTO

1. nei[...]
2. loosed su[...]
3. truly after the ... themselv[es]
4. Jein more sensib[le]
5. Iton as me ou[r]
6. Jou and corruption rale tês. [...]
7. remembering Jacob. [...]
8. les of the earth, and except for you[
9. Iôs I Pharaoh,[...]
10. ...ou save me also not ph[...]
11. Iôs... that they may bless me[...]
12. ... in the disease[...]
13. ...... of easy ... on the one hand the pl[...]
14. ...ukas guards[...]
15. jeusen Joseph, remembering[...]
16. theis king of the people ka[...]
17. straight there being mu[ch] grain[...]
18. ? he sa[ld]: "Gather unto me tichi[...]
19. land [the] famine passe[s] through[...]
20. Inè and when[... the al[...]
21. nta[... receiving the com[mand]
22. of every ... of all the grain up[...]
23. Iou he became a provider[...]
24. Jose[ph remembering Jac[ob]
25. cove[...d the] land[...]
26. the famine euthun[...]
27. Phara[oh upon Jo[seph]
28. b]essed[...]

B RECTO

1. they went to Canaan[but the]
2. leaped, and the sight[...]
3. the number of the ten s[ons]

h. Lit. "he appeared (as) a nourisher."

i. Lit. "[stlanding against."

j. Or "group of ambassadors."

k. A mé supplied at this point would suit the context better.

l. Milne supplies "Abraham," but in view of B verso 11 and B recto 9 Joseph would seem to be more likely.

m. Lit. "to trace (or track) out."

n. Gk. tai's could also be the dative plural ending of a noun.

o. The order of B recto and B verso as published by Milne has been reversed in the present edition. Not only does B verso seem to precede B recto according to the story line of Gen 42, but also the first lines of B verso appear to be from the same setting as the last lines of A verso. Furthermore, the hand of the upper part of B verso follows that of A verso, while the shift in hands occurs at the bottom of B verso and continues throughout B recto, thus verifying our reversal of Milne's order.

p. Lit. "with me."

q. Supplied from F.

r. F mistakenly has eskirda for eskira in B, thus suggesting that it was a less carefully written manuscript.

s. Milne reads C[anaanites]. However, the last letter preserved in this line could be an n rather than a ch. This makes possible our restoration of huîəm, which would fit the context better.
psion in my presence kata
kate now, lead away
the relative to[ward?
asthe to me, . . . too[k
as before the(m)[
to them, pa...akr[
jos justly these (things)[
the God of Joseph, remem[bering
your . . . I will call, Reube[n
seerving you, mé[
not to be angry, flesh[
os acting foolishly ka[
and . . .mous tou[
jis ka[

. . . . . . call. ..[
le now shows to the father ..[
in remain with me a[
e. and having loosed eu.[
eth each cuts² my[
to see [Ja]cob as a deer epi[
), the water lab.[
traces of four more lines

1. Both B and F have deicha for dicha.
2. Supplied from F.
3. F adds "to him" at this point.
4. Supplied from F.
5. Read kteinai for ktnai.
6. Supplied from F. It is conceivable that "God of Joseph" from the following line is the subject of "softened," thus making it possible that in II. 6–9 the brothers are telling Jacob that the king (Joseph) in Egypt was insolent against them and
became angry and was going to kill them, but by Jacob's entreaties the God of Joseph softened his heart.

z. Corrected by reference to F from Milne's "'in your [si]ns the God of Ja[cob]."

a2. Lit. "'I have the high point.'"