The Celebration of Passover in *Josephus*: A Means of Strengthening Jewish Identity?

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Introduction

The problem of “identity” is itself one of the most complicated issues of human existence. Whatever aspect of it is analyzed will result in many difficulties. Who am I? Where am I coming from? Where am I going? These are some of the most existential questions, which consciously or unconsciously pervade the life of each person in the world. This paper is certainly not an attempt to solve this problem. It is important, however, to realize from the very beginning that it is not evident what the “identity” of a given people or group is.

Actually, each serious study on this subject starts with an attempt to clarify what “identity” means for its author.¹ In this regard, the analysis of Uffe Østergård is truly illuminating and highly recommended as a starting point for a definition of “national” and “ethnic” identity.² Some sociological and anthropological approaches, which were set forth during the last centuries as possible explanations of this argument, are presented there. Finally, combining the results of different studies, he describes “ethnic identity” as an ensemble of myths (*mythomoteur*), which defines the identity in relation to a specific polity.³


Without doubt, the presentation of Shaye Cohen is also very valuable and, in fact, does not diverge a great deal from that of Uffe Østergård.\textsuperscript{4} For this paper, it should be enough to consider simply—not simplisticly—the fact that Flavius Josephus (henceforward: FJ) actually makes a clear distinction between “us” and “them.” Consequently, the aim of this study is to delineate the role of Passover—according to FJ—in order to define who belonged in each category, and to determine whether this feast was a means to strengthen the bonds among those considered “us.”

Whether FJ represents the so-called common Judaism, only a given group or actually no one, is a question that cannot be addressed here. Certainly, the results of this study will be more or less significant according to the option assumed regarding this matter. This paper presumes that FJ wrote, particularly the \textit{Jewish Antiquities} (henceforward: \textit{Ant.}), with the intention of presenting himself as an authoritative representative of Judaism. Whether he was attempting to vindicate a leadership in a concrete community or whether he was successful in his endeavor also extends beyond the scope of this work.

That Passover was a means of strengthening the Jewish identity in the rabbinic literature is quite evident.\textsuperscript{5} Even today it represents a very special celebration; what Shimon Peres states could be considered a very common conception:

La sortie d’Égypte est ainsi devenue centrale dans l’identité juive. C’est un axe du calendrier. La Haggadah de Pâque, en particulier, en retrace l’histoire. «À chaque génération, dit la Michna, qui a été écrite au II\textsuperscript{e} siècle, l’homme doit se considérer comme s’il était lui-même sorti d’Égypte.» [ … ] Le souvenir de la sortie d’Égypte n’est donc pas une affaire purement historique. C’est une norme de conduite qui ne

\textsuperscript{4} Shaye J.D. Cohen, \textit{The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties} (Berkeley: University of California, 1999), 1-10.

concerne pas seulement la communauté dans son ensemble. 
Elle revêt une signification personnelle, intime.  

FJ affirms a similar concept, in general, for all the pilgrimage feasts: Tabernacles, Passover, and Pentecost (Ant. 4.203-204); hence, the question proposed in the title could be considered as already solved. Nevertheless, there are still possibilities for research as to how he develops and utilizes this conception of the feasts, in particular, of Passover, and whether this statement applies to the situation after the destruction of the Temple, when actually FJ produced his works.

Passover in Jewish War (henceforward: J.W.)

In this essay, due to brevity, the feast of Unleavened Bread and that of Passover are identified. Indeed this is what FJ does in his writings, 7 when he has no special reason to distinguish them. 8 This first opus of FJ was not intended as a presentation of the Jewish beliefs; consequently, the references to the Jewish festivities have a different purpose in its presentation. Passover is mentioned several times, and in some cases with a very specific purpose. 9

The fact that FJ dates the fall of Masada as well as the previous slaughter of the Sicarii on the night between the fourteenth and fifteenth of Xanthicus (J.W. 7.401), 10 was already pointed out by some scholars. 11 The

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6 Shimon Peres, Que le soleil se lève (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1999), 22-23.  
7 Cf. J.W. 2.10; Ant. 14.21  
8 Cf. Ant. 3.248-249.  
9 Cf. J.W. 2.10, 224, 244, 280; 4.402; 5.99; 6.290, 421, 423.  
10 It is well-known that the last book of J.W. was written later in more than one phase; cf. Seth Schwartz, “The Composition and Publication of Josephus’s Bellum Iudaicum Book 7,” HTR 79 (1986): 373-386. The Slavonic version of J.W. has another date for the fall of Masada, which could be a sign that FJ changed the date in a posterior re-working of his narrative.  
implied reference to Passover and to the slaughtered lambs appears quite evident.12

When considering FJ’s presentation of the outbreak of the war, it seems that a certain connection with this feast could be identified. Certainly, especially in this matter, for apologetic reasons, FJ is somewhat confusing. Even if he does not conceal completely that the decision to interrupt the sacrifice for the emperor was a formal declaration of war against the Romans (J.W. 2.409); he presents the event in Caesarea as the true beginning of the confrontations (J.W. 2.284).

These events are clearly dated during the period between Passover and Pentecost, i.e., in the month of Artemisius. Consequently, the beginning of the Jewish war is also connected with this celebration for FJ.13 In this way, FJ manifests the first signs that Passover is not mentioned simply by accident in his works. The revolution appears as the betrayal of what this feast actually represented: the rebels trying to gain freedom brought the people into slavery

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13 The incidents begin with a provocation, which seems to remind the Jews that they were expelled from Egypt because of their leprosy. This was one of the accusations that some non-Jewish authors alleged regarding the exodus. The previous episode is the narration of Cestius Gallus’ visit to Jerusalem during a Passover (J.W. 2.280-283). Whether this Passover is that of 65 or 66 C.E. is a matter of debate, however, the close connection of these two events in FJ’s presentation is quite clear through the use of the temporal expression “Meanwhile…” (Ἐν δὲ τούτῳ).
instead. Since freedom is one of the essential requirements for vindicating a concrete identity, FJ, by contrast, seems to suggest that the identity pursued by the rebels was false, and that the real identity is derived from the facts celebrated in this feast.

The reference to Passover in *J.W.* 4.402-403 appears to play the same role in his narrative. There is no better way to show the intrinsic wickedness of the Sicarii than to recount their attack on a Jewish town during this feast. Their identity appears as opposed to that of the true Jews, who were probably in Jerusalem for the feast.

The majority of the signs foretelling the destruction of the City and the Temple, which FJ collects in a special section (*J.W.* 6.288-300), are dated during the time between Passover and Pentecost, and the others are more or less connected with them. Even if the distinction between the correct and incorrect interpretation of these omens is not always explicitly expressed, it seems clear that those who chose the war as a means of liberation were wrong and instead, the sacred scribes were right (*J.W.* 6.291-295). In this way again, an implicit opposition is suggested by FJ: on one hand, the rebels and their failure to correctly understand the omens —most of them related with Passover— on the other, the scribes who correctly predicted what would happen in the future. Passover is again use virtually as a means to distinguish between the two groups.

Finally, there is another occasion in which FJ takes advantage of a Passover celebration to shed a bad light on the rebels (*J.W.* 5.99-105). The rebels inside the walls of the city were divided in three parties. Those defending themselves in the Temple allowed the followers of John of Gischala to enter into the court to worship, since it was Passover. These rebels actually wanted to get inside in order to attack the others and the supposedly cultic act became a bloodbath. At the same time, Titus laid siege to the area around Jerusalem, no doubt taking advantage of the Jewish festivity (*J.W.* 128-135). This Roman “incorrectness” is covered by FJ in a very cunning way, in order

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14 Actually, in *J.W.* 5.567 FJ plainly affirms that this episode occurred on the fourteenth of Xanthicus.
to excuse his patrons. This is also a tendency discernable in FJ’s presentation of Passover.

The next passage to be considered is ostensibly the best known and the most frequently cited by modern scholars regarding Passover (J.W. 6.421-427). In reality, the description that FJ conveys in this text is incidental to the context, and he does not appear to attempt a complete description of the Passover celebration. Almost all the elements reported serve to justify the figures he provides regarding the number of people who died during the siege. This fact notwithstanding, this information is highly significant in different ways.

As far as the identity of the Jews is concerned, it should be emphasized that the participants form small groups around each paschal victim, the purity requirements are very strict, and all foreigners are excluded. The fact that this passage is not directly concerned with a description of Passover, bestows a greater value on the information, i.e., FJ is not worried about concealing some elements, as he will be in other passages: for example, the fact that strangers are not allowed to participate. In addition, it is noteworthy that the small groups seem to be a very effective way of avoiding intrusions, as well as a means of strengthening unity in a concrete manner. The importance of purity in relation to Passover will be analyzed in a separate section.

The other references to Passover in J.W. seem to be only a means of dating the events,15 and in their parallel passages in Ant., FJ will add some new aspects, which indicate how this author utilizes this feast in order to convey his message. Therefore, it is necessary to scrutinize more carefully his presentation of Passover in Ant.

Passover in the Jewish Antiquities

The Biblical Paraphrase

It is not surprising that in this work FJ mentions this feast more frequently and in a more significant way, since it represents his attempt to

15 Cf. J.W. 2.10; 2.224, 244
depict the entire history of the Jewish people up until the beginning of the Jewish war.

The biblical paraphrase could provide a relatively certain point of departure to understand what is more significant about this feast for FJ, since all that he preserves, subtracts, or adds to the biblical text may be appreciated. A detailed analysis of each pericope will not be provided in this paper, so as not to overburden the reader, since a presentation of the main results will suffice for the aim of this study.

In the Pentateuch Passover is referred to several times and FJ reports most of these references, even if the omissions are also significant. The Passover of Egypt is described—as usual for FJ—in an abbreviated form (Ant. 2.311-319). According to his style and the nature of this work, he does not furnish many instructions regarding the way in which the feast should be celebrated. Nevertheless, precisely because of this brevity, the aspects that he maintains as well as those that he adds are highly significant. Among these are the following: the connection between the sacrifice and the departure from Egypt is emphasized; a reference to purification is added to the source; the familial character of the feast is preserved; the meaning of the unleavened bread is changed.

The fact that in two glosses, FJ affirms that “they” celebrate these feasts (Passover and Unleavened Bread) in his days (Ant. 2.313, 317), in the same way as it was celebrated in Egypt merits particular consideration; the real meaning of this statement will be studied later. Among the omissions, it is noteworthy that he does not affirm that the uncircumcised are not allowed to participate in the feast (Exod 12:43-49), nor does he mention the laws regarding the consecration of the first-borns (Exod 13:1-2, 11-16).

The next occasion when FJ paraphrases the biblical text regarding Passover is in his presentation of all the feasts (Ant. 3.248-251). He combines the legislation of Lev 23:5-14 and Num 28:16-25 there. Although he is once again more succinct, he appears to stress the same elements as in the previous

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16 This analysis can be found in Federico M. Colautti, *Passover in the Works of Josephus* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

17 The word “unleavened bread” will be capitalized only if it refers to the feast itself.
section, i.e., the connection with the departure from Egypt, the familial character and, in addition, the fact that nothing from the meal should be left for the next day. In this passage, it is striking that FJ clearly identifies himself and his contemporaries with the generation that left Egypt (Ant. 3.248). This use of “we” seems to reflect a definite identity, however, who is included or not remains an open question. This sort of “actualization” of the feast is found, as is well-known, in the rabbinic literature as well.18

Concerning the date of the celebration, FJ provides all the necessary elements for its correct calculation. In regard to other instructions, occasionally he is very precise, as for the date of the presentation of the first sheaf (Ant. 3.256), and on other occasions, somewhat imprecise (Ant. 2.317). This behavior could be an indication that FJ attempts to avoid the issues that could have raised a polemic among the different Jewish groups.

Finally, regarding the other references to Passover in the Pentateuch, it is noteworthy that FJ attributes to the so-called pilgrimage feast the purpose of strengthening the fraternal bonds among the people (Ant. 4.203-204). In this respect, it is significant that the gathering place should be chosen by the people and not by God (Ant. 4.203),19 which makes the centralization of the cult so strongly presented in Deut 16:5-6 relative. The possibility of celebrating a Passover in the second month for those not prepared for it in the first is systematically omitted in the entire work of FJ. This fact notwithstanding, he mentions the first celebration of Passover in the desert one year after the departure from Egypt, following Num 9:1-14, where the biblical text refers to the aforementioned exemption.

The book of Joshua contains the account of the first celebration of Passover in the promised land (Josh 4-6). In addition to many other interesting aspects, what concerns the subject of this study are the following elements: the references to the circumcision are avoided (Josh 5:2-9), and a strong connection between the Passover of Egypt and that of Gilgal is suggested by the manner in which FJ re-works his source(s) (Ant. 5.20-21). This last aspect

18 Cf. m. Pesah. 10:5.
19 In Ant. 4.200 FJ says that it is God who chooses the place for the city where the Temple shall be erected, but he specifies that it shall be made known through prophecy.
confers a greater meaning on the celebration of Passover, since it seems to commemorate the entire process of liberation from Egypt to the promised land. The etymology provided for the name Gilgal, “freedom,” appears as a way to emphasize this statement (Ant. 5.34). In the same manner, the fact that FJ never makes a distinction—regarding Passover—between the laws that are in force before and after the entrance into the promise land reinforces the probability of this hypothesis.

FJ then continues to report the other instances in which the biblical text narrates the celebration of Passover during the monarchical period, namely, that of Hezekiah (Ant. 9.260-275), as well as that of Josiah (Ant. 10.68-73). In the first account, FJ again demonstrates his concern regarding purity in relationship to Passover, since according to his composition of the narration, all the participants of the festivity are already in Jerusalem when the rites of purification are accomplished (Ant. 9.268-270). Consequently, the need for a celebration in the second month—as stated above—disappears, as well as the fact that the Levites slaughtered the animal for those who were not purified. Furthermore, FJ does not record that the Israelites continued to celebrate for one week more, nor does he mention the participation of the foreign residents. At the same time, he carefully clarifies that Hezekiah’s intentions when he summoned the other tribes of Israel to come to Jerusalem for the festivity, are not political at all (Ant. 9.264).20

In the case of Josiah’s Passover, the utilization of the source(s) is quite complicated. At times he diverges significantly from them (Ant. 10.65-67), but in other occasions, he is very close to their account (Ant. 10.71). The relevance of purity is reiterated again, and the fact that the Levites slaughtered the victims is not mentioned; instead, FJ only affirms that the priests guided the people (Ant. 10.72). It could be noteworthy for understanding FJ’s modus operandi that, even if he never mentioned before the necessity that the victims for the paschal sacrifice should be born in the same year (cf. Exod 12:5), he takes this for granted here (Ant. 10.70).

20 It may be for this reason that, even if he mentions that the Israelites were supposed to return to their former way of life (ἐίς τὴν ἀρχαίαν ἐπανελθεῖν συνήθειαν), he does not use the word πολιτεία in this context, since it could have a political meaning.
The celebration of Passover following the exile is the last reference that FJ conveys from the time before the Second Temple period (Ant. 11.109-11). In this case, his use of the sources is also quite complicated, and a more intensive transformation of the sources could be appreciated when he narrates the celebration of Passover. However, some of the aspects already pointed out, as well as new ones, also emerge in this section. One of these is the insistence on purity, which FJ stresses once again in his account of the first Passover after the exile (Ant. 11.109). Prior to this, FJ mentions, probably relying on 1 Esd 4:62-63, a feast before the return from Babylon to Jerusalem and seems to identify it with a Passover (Ant. 11.66).

This hypothesis of identification is supported by the fact that FJ indirectly dates it on the first month,21 and assimilates its motives to those he afterwards attributes to the first Passover in Jerusalem following the exile (Ant. 11.66, 110). The reason for celebration is that the Jews could return to their land and live according to their ancestral laws. The mention of the ancestral laws is not at all accidental, nor is the reference to the different forms of government (πολιτεία) under which the Jewish people have lived during their history (Ant. 11.111-113). This connection, however, will be analyzed in a separate section.

Second Temple Period

It is somewhat curious that for the rest of the Persian period and during the entire Hellenistic era, FJ does not make any reference to the celebration of Passover. It is true, however, that there are not many references in the other sources for this period to actual celebrations of this feast.22

21 This date could be deducted from the fact that in Ant. 11.75, FJ states that the deported arrived in Jerusalem after seven months and they celebrated the feast of Tabernacles. In 1 Esd 8:60 and Ezra 8:31 it is said that the third wave of those exiled returned with the priest Ezra.

22 The papyri of Elephantine are among the most famous examples; cf. Peter Schäfer, Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1997), 123-128. It could be significant that this letter is apparently due to tension between the Jewish community and the local people.
The beginning of the Roman presence in Palestine will be the occasion for FJ to add a reference to Passover into the narrative of *Ant.*, which he did not mention in the parallel passage of *J.W*. This addition, which actually consists of two different elements combined, is highly indicative of the role Passover will play in the unfolding of the events, leading to the onset of the Jewish war (*Ant.* 14.19-28).

While FJ accounts the conflicts between the two Hasmonean brothers, Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II, to obtain political power, he mentions two episodes that happened during the celebration of Passover, which emphasize the wickedness of what transpired. The first incident is the stoning of a certain Onias—a person well-regarded for his ability to stop the drought through his prayers—since he refuses to curse Aristobulus and his followers, and offers a prayer for both parties instead (*Ant.* 14.21-24). The second is the request of an exorbitant sum of money in order to provide the necessary victims for Passover to those enclosed in the city during the siege. In addition to their iniquity, after taking the money, they did not supply the requested animals in exchange (*Ant.* 14.25-27).

Prior to the narration of the first iniquity, FJ adds a short note regarding the “best-reputed people” (*δοκιμωτατοι*), who leave the country to go to Egypt (*Ant.* 14.21). In addition to the fact that in all probability, this really happened, since it is improbable that either FJ or his source invented such a statement, it is noteworthy that FJ reports a sort of “anti-exodus” in the time of Passover, and seems to suggest the possibility of emigrating in order to celebrate the feasts.

Concerning the first episode itself, FJ endeavors to show the importance of unity, especially through the prayer of Onias, and that the beginning of the process that will bring the people into slavery is due to the attempt to change the traditional form of government (*Ant.* 14.41). Thus, the connection between Passover and the system of government (*πολιτεία*) emerges again. Evidently, the internal divisions and the supposed attempt to alter the traditional way of ruling the nation are a serious attack against the “identity” of the Jews.

The second misdeed in the account has a similar function to the previous one. The gravity of this evil, however, is greater because they offended God himself. Actually, the people not only missed celebrating
Passover, but they also hinder the priest from doing it. This episode is also known from the rabbinic literature, but there it is not set in the context of Passover. This augments the probability that FJ is purposely utilizing the Passover motif to accentuate his message.

Once again, during the reign of Herod the Great all references to Passover disappear until the moment of his death and succession by his son Archelaus. This episode is related in both J.W. 2.1-13 and Ant. 17.200-218, with minor divergences. In this case, it is highly improbable that FJ dates the events in Passover merely in an artificial manner. Indeed, the death of Herod occurred at the beginning of spring and the turmoil of his succession could well have coincided with the time of Passover. Nevertheless, it is significant that FJ augmented his narration in Ant. and takes this opportunity to stress that Passover was the most important feast of the Jews, since at this celebration they sacrificed more than at any other festivity (Ant. 17.213).

On the other hand, the wrath of the people was in part due to the fact that Herod, some days before his death, had ordered the execution of the “doctors of the law,” which incited some young men to destroy the image of an eagle that Herod had placed in the Temple. The way in which FJ narrates this episode masks its connection to Passover. However, it is temporally close to this feast and ostensibly caused by the desire to “purify” the Temple for the celebration. FJ cannot present these aspects clearly, because they could show the relation between Passover and some anti-Roman feelings. The eagle, in fact, was not a neutral symbol but represented the image of the Roman Empire.

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23 Cf. b. Sotah 49b; b. Menah. 64b; b. B. Qam. 82b.
24 It could also be significant that the possible source of FJ for these passages, Nicolaus of Damascus, narrates this account in his work, De Vita Sua, saying that the disturbance originated because the Jews attacked the Greek population; Menahem Stern, Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism. I. From Herodotus to Plutarch (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974), no. 97, lines 53-64; Felix Jacoby, Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker (Berlin: Weidmann, 1923-1958) II A 90, F 136 (8-9) lines 16-28.
The next reference to Passover seems to correspond again to another sort of milestone regarding the Roman presence in Palestine (\textit{Ant}. 18.29-30). After the deposition and subsequent exile of Archelaus, Judea became a Roman province and Coponius was its first procurator. In concomitance with this further step toward the total extinction of the Jewish political autonomy, the Samaritans will perpetrate an attack on the Temple during the time of Passover, which will result in stricter regulations —according to FJ— with respect to persons entering the Temple.

The account is somewhat intricate, but the message it conveys appears quite clear: the rigid regulations for the admittance to the Temple have a historical reason. In addition, FJ seems to endeavor to transmit other complementary ideas, among which the problem of identity is prominent. Who was admitted and who was rejected? How was it possible to distinguish between Jews and Samaritans? These are some of the questions which seem to emerge from this short passage. Consequently, Passover may have been the best period of time to set this episode into context, since the matters addressed correspond well with the themes implied by this festivity. A possible corroboration of this hypothesis could be found in the previous context of this incident, where FJ makes a summary of four Jewish “philosophies” that were followed at that time. The mention of the Samaritans could be a way of completing the portrayal of the situation in Palestine by depicting the position of the Samaritans as antagonists of the Jews. This attempt to contaminate the Temple is another indication of the importance of purity in relation to Passover for FJ.

The visits of Vitellius to Jerusalem have provoked a notable debate among scholars, since the given chronology does not fit well with other known events. Basically, there are two positions that can be offered as a solution: on one hand, it is possible that FJ tells the same event twice; on the other, FJ may have altered the chronology, purposely or not. According to the observations already proposed in this essay, it appears possible that FJ purposely alters the chronology of the events to conceal some aspects and to manifest others. Concretely, the first visit (\textit{Ant}. 18.90-95), which according to FJ happened during a Passover, should have happened some months before; the second (\textit{Ant}. 18.120-124), which FJ connects with an unidentified feast,
should have happened during Passover 37 C.E., since he receives the news regarding the death of Tiberius at that time.

The reason to set, in an artificial way, the first visit during a Passover could be apparent, since the people received Vitellius joyfully and he granted many benefits to them. In this way, FJ shows that good governors and peaceful crowds could live together, and the religious practices are not an impediment for their mutual relationship. The basis for not mentioning the name of the feast the Jews are celebrating during the second visit of Vitellius could stem from FJ’s desire to dissimulate the fact that during Passover the nationalistic feelings were more enkindled and the tolerance to the signs of the foreign domination diminished. Actually, they ask Vitellius not to march with the standards through their land (Ant. 18.121).

The last reference to Passover, in Ant. 20.106, is a passage parallel to the one in J.W. 2.224. The provocation of a soldier during this feast will unleash a sequence of turmoil that lasts until the next Passover, which is only explicitly mentioned in J.W. 2.244 and not in Ant. 20.133, where FJ simply says that the Jews were celebrating a feast. This year of disorders does not contribute greatly to the purpose of this paper. It is only noteworthy because it shows how the feasts, perhaps especially Passover, were an opportunity for disturbances and that FJ attempts to mitigate this bad impression by blaming a Roman soldier for his offensive behavior, and the masses for having abandoned the celebration to engage in the fight.

Of more relevance than the prior account is the way in which FJ concludes his narration in Ant. 20.255-257, and invites the reader to read his previous work, namely J.W., in order to know what happened afterwards. In that passage, as well as in the parallel passage of J.W. 2.279, he states that many Jews were forced to emigrate and to abandon their customs or their ancestral custom, due to the terrible situation created by the rebels and the

25 If the intended reader would follow FJ’s advice, he should begin reading J.W. with the passage that recounts the event which happened during Passover 65 or 66 C.E.
26 Henry St.J. Thackeray translates this word in J.W. 2.279 as “haunts,” and Louis H. Feldman in Ant. 20.256 as “country.” Either the word “custom” or “character” would seem preferable, in the sense of what characterizes something, because it agrees with the
bad Roman governors. This sort of anti-exodus is a means of justifying, especially in *Ant.*, the beginning of the war, and also it manifests the concern FJ could have had that the Jews could be assimilated into the customs of their new countries.

Finally, *Ant.* 3.321 should be mentioned in order to report all the instances where FJ refers to this feast. The passage concerns the fidelity with which the Jews follow the law of Moses, and one example of this is that no priest dares to eat a crumb of wheat brought in during the days of the feast of the Unleavened Bread. The reason why did they not eat wheat is not clear. Henry St.J. Thackeray supposed that the wheat was brought in the form of leavened loaves, so for that reason, it was unlawful to eat them.27 Another explanation could be that the wheat was of foreign origin, hence not kosher, and because of this, it was unlawful to eat it.28 According to the second hypothesis, the relation between Passover, the law of Moses, purity, and — consequently — identity, appears more evident.

Passover and Purity

FJ is not normally considered an author who can contribute to a better understanding of the purity system and its importance for Judaism. Actually, he is ignored in virtually all the studies regarding this subject. Nevertheless, FJ demonstrates an interest in “purity,” which justifies a more accurate study than could be accomplished in this essay. It should be sufficient for the scope of

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28 Actually, the translation “crumb” seems to be more adequate in this context than “loaf.” An analogous case would be that of the oil which the Jews apparently did not accept from foreigners (*J.W.* 2.591-592; *Ant.* 12.119-120; *Life* 74-76). cf. Martin Goodman, “Kosher Olive Oil in Antiquity,” in *A Tribute to Geza Vermes: Essays on Jewish and Christian Literature and History* (ed. P.R. Davies and R.T. White; JSOTSup 100; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990), 227-245.
this work to show that the connection between Passover and purity is highly significant for him.

A brief survey of the texts concerning Passover and purity could be useful in appreciating the validity of the previous statement. The first text is precisely the account of the escape from Egypt (Ant. 2.312). Here the allusion to purification is brief but significant, considering that it is an addition to the biblical text. It deals with the purification of the houses, which could perhaps be an analogy to the purification of the Temple, i.e., a fitting environment for the manifestation of God’s holiness. The need for purification can be explained simply by the fact that they found themselves in a foreign country, which provided a sure source of impurity.

The second consideration is that FJ systematically removes the possibility of celebrating a second Passover for those who are either not in a state of purity during the first month, or are unable to celebrate for other reasons. This omission is not easy to evaluate in relation to the problem of purity. On one hand, at times he contradicts his source(s), declaring that all were fit to celebrate (Ant. 9.268-272); on the other hand, he does not deny that some were excluded from the feast due to problems of impurity (J.W. 6.426). It could be assumed that FJ preferred to have the impure wait for a year, rather than having to devalue the feast by granting a second, low-key opportunity.

Continuing with the list of relevant passages, one finds the three celebrations in the pre- and post-exilic periods. The two reformer kings, Hezekiah and Josiah, celebrate the feast of Passover at the correct time, and each occasion lends itself to a purification of the people and of the land (Ant. 9.268-272; 10.68-72). Similarly, those who return from exile are not divided by this author into pure and impure, but all are portrayed as ready to take part in the sacrifice (Ant. 11.109-111).

In no way can these occasions be termed secondary. On the contrary, these are landmarks in the history of Israel, and examples as to how the people and their rulers should behave. Given the relevance of these events, the importance of purity on these occasions can be assumed, because FJ disregards other aspects, but does not wish to omit this one. It seems equally worth noting that, in the three cases when the people are in a state of purity, he
avoids the divisions and distinctions among the people that are present in his source(s).

It is now necessary to proceed to an event occurring at Passover toward the beginning of this era. FJ recounts that a group of Samaritans scattered human bones in the Temple (Ant. 18.29-30). This incident, in spite of being exceedingly mysterious, is a further proof of the importance of purity at Passover, since one must suppose that the Samaritans, in their desire to do real harm, would have chosen the most significant moment to do it. Thus the impurity undoubtedly caused by the bones would have been a great scandal in connection with the celebration of that Passover.

On another occasion, the leaders (πρῶτοι) among the Jews ask Vitellius not to enter Jerusalem with foreign troops during a feast —as suggested above— most probably Passover (Ant. 18.120-124). This request indicates that purity at the celebrations of Passover was essential, not only for FJ, but for all in general, since the requirement does not seem exceptional. That FJ does not explicitly say this was a Passover could be explained by the fact that the petition would sound somewhat suspicious if it occurred precisely on the feast of the liberation of Israel.

The provocative act in Caesarea of a Greek, who sacrifices birds on an inverted jar at the entrance to the synagogue (J.W. 2.289-290), can be weighed equally. This is considered a profanation of the place (μεμισσένων τῶν χορίων), which unleashes the anger of some who are present. Once again, without being the central theme of the passage, the preoccupation with purity at the time of Passover reappears. It should be noted that, even though he is not dealing with Jerusalem or the Temple, he speaks, nevertheless, of impurity using a technical term such as μισίνω (to profane).

The last text regards FJ’s famous description of the requirements for celebrating Passover. Among all he lists, one of the most important is ritual purity, the absence of which automatically excludes one from participation in the Passover feast (J.W. 6.425-427). Foreigners, who cannot participate in the sacrifice, are treated in the same way as the impure (cf. m. Ṭebhar. 7:6; t. Pesah. 7:13).

29 It says explicitly that it is a tradition (πάτρην) which establishes this prohibition.
FJ’s tendency to rationalize the meaning of the laws is well-known. For this reason, it would be strange if he were to make an exception in the case of purity. Considering the sacred and profane use of the semantic derivations of καθαρέω, the element most common to both areas seems to be that of “purity as an absence of mixture.” Hence, for FJ it is probable that the essential element, which makes the whole system of ritual purity logical, is the absence of mixture.

Therefore, it is likely that ritual purity is viewed by FJ as a return to a primordial state (cf. Ag. Ap. 2.179-181), to an integrity dictated by the moral law (cf. Ag. Ap. 2.192). For this reason, another essential aspect of purity for FJ is the absence of foreign elements within the community (Ag. Ap. 2.210) and within the priestly families (Ant. 3.258, 276-279; Ag. Ap. 1.30-32). As a consequence of this, there is a severity in the laws against mixed marriages (cf. Ant. 11.139-143), and in the need for total acceptance of Jewish laws in order to become part of the Jewish community (Ag. Ap. 2.210).

The fact that he stresses purity in relation to Passover suggests that this feast especially requires no blend or mixtures. In this sense, even if he is not always clear when affirming the exclusion of the uncircumcised from Passover, he states this exclusion firmly though in an indirect manner. Consequently, what at a first glance appears as a certain laxity on the part of FJ regarding the admittance of the non-Jewish to the celebration, is actually a cunning way of presenting the prohibition in an acceptable form to his readers, both Jewish and non-Jewish.

The significance of purity for FJ as disclosed in this study is obviously connected with the theme of identity. The states of purity and impurity create a boundary that automatically excludes the non-Jews and place a condition on the Jews. The impure Jew could be excluded from the cult on some occasion, hence also from Passover, just as a non-Jew is on principle. Certainly, this impurity does not necessarily imply a moral transgression for the Jew.

Once the argument of “boundaries” is proposed, it is necessary to focus on the whole system, which actually established the borders of the community of those considered Jews, what FJ sometimes calls politeia.

The Politeia of the Jews and Passover
In contrast to the previous section, FJ is one of the most frequently utilized sources in regard to determining what the Jewish politeia/politeuma actually was.\(^{30}\) The most debated question is whether the Jews in the Greco-Roman cities attempted to achieve a special status, in which their way of life was recognized, or whether they pretended to be equal to the other Greek citizens.\(^{31}\)

G. Lüderitz, analyzing the epigraphic material at his disposition, endeavors to determine the meaning that the word politeuma would have had. According to him, it is time to forget the historiographic legend of the politeuma being civil organizations recognized by the Greeks’ polis. On the other hand, having considered the great variety of meaning that this term can entail, he seeks to provide an explanation for what would have been the politeuma of the Jews of Berenice, since it is the only true attestation to an organization with an apparent civil recognition inside a polis. Although he based his conclusions upon various deductions, which are not liable to an exhaustive verification —e.g., the meaning of the word “amphitheater” in the

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case of the city of Berenice—the *politeuma* is for him a kind of council (βουλή), similar to those of other cities of the Cyrenaica.32

Without pretending to resolve this difficult problem, the conclusions of Daniel R. Schwartz will be adopted, since they appear to be a balanced evaluation of the information. He demonstrates that FJ conceives the future of the Jewish community in the Roman Empire to be a *politeia/politeuma*, guided by a high priest (προστασία). Consequently, in order to expose this form of government in the proper manner, FJ antedated it to the stages prior to the destruction of the Temple. Thus, his model does not appear as an innovation, which is exactly his criticism of the rebels.33

It is noteworthy that in *J.W.* only the word *politeia* is used and *politeuma* does not appear. The first word—in the few instances that it is mentioned—clearly possesses a technical meaning, which oscillates between form of government (e.g., aristocracy, monarchy, etc.; cf. *J.W.* 1.169) and

32 Without questioning G. Lüderitz’s hypothesis, from the analysis of FJ’s references to the *politeuma*, it does not seem that this meaning would apply in his works. Christine Gerber’s definition, i.e., a *politeuma* is a theocracy that includes all the people who follow the law of Moses, seems to fit better with FJ’s conception; cf. Gert Lüderitz, *Corpus jüdischer Zeugnisse aus der Cyrenaika mit einem Anhang von Joyce M. Reynolds* (BTAVA.B 53; Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1983), 151, 154, 158; Id., “What is a Politeuma?,” in *Studies in Early Jewish Epigraphy* (ed. J.W. van Henten – P.W. van der Horst; AGJU 21; Leiden: Brill, 1994) 183-222; ; Christine Gerber, *Ein Bild des Judentums für Nichtjuden von Flavius Josephus: Untersuchungen zu seiner Schrift Contra Apionem* (AGJU 40; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 338-359.

right of Roman citizenship. The verb πολιτεύω is present only once, and expresses the action of making a treaty or pact (J.W. 1.513).

In Ant. the word politeia, while preserving the most technical meaning such as in J.W., is opened to a series of aspects that reflect the constitutive reality of the Jews, i.e., what characterized the Jews as a distinct community (cf. Ant. 1.10). The word politeuma, which normally is analogous to politeia, excluding the concept of “citizenship,” is also found in Ant.

Christine Gerber maintains that a distinction can be made between the terms politeia and politeuma, since politeuma is never used to designate a “constitution” or “administrative organization,” but rather a community of persons. In the case of the Jews, this politeuma is not united because of the place in which they live, but because of the law that they follow. Even if this distinction is valid, it cannot be denied that in some contexts of FJ’s works, the words politeia and politeuma are interchangeable (cf. Ant. 1.5, 10). For this reason, a strict separation of these two terms is not particularly useful in this study.

The use of this term occurs more frequently in Ag. Ap., since the purpose of this work is to defend the antiquity and the value of the politeia/politeuma of the Jews (e.g., Ag Ap. 2.226).

Accordingly, when FJ refers to the politeia/politeuma of the Jews in Ant. and Ag. Ag., these terms are often accompanied by a reference to the laws

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34 When the word politeia means “Roman citizenship,” it is a technical term, which can be easily understood, since there is a copious information regarding the evolution of this institution. Part of the imperial policy was to grant citizenship to different people, as a strategy of expansion; cf. Adrian N. Sherwin-White, The Roman Citizenship (2nd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1980).


(νόμοι) (Ant. 3.213; Ag. Ap. 1.250), or more specifically to the laws of the
Fathers (πάτριοι νόμοι; πάτρια) (Ant. 11.140; 12.240, 280; 13.3).

Taking into consideration all the instances in which FJ connects,
directly or indirectly, the celebration of Passover with the law, the law of
Moses, the ancestral laws, etc., it is fair to imagine that this connection is not
at all accidental. The passage in which, after narrating the first Passover
subsequent to the return from the exile, he enumerates the different forms of
government of the Jewish people during their history merits particular
attention (Ant. 11.111-112). The analogy between the situation after the exile
and the one FJ probably desires to regain, after the destruction of the Temple,
is obvious. Hence, the regime he presents as the best in this pericope could be
the one he proposed for the reorganization of the Jews after the war.

The final question is whether this politeia/politeuma of the Jews was
only a sort of universal brotherhood, as proposed by the stoics, or a concrete
community with defined borders. Several scholars have demonstrated that the
second option is the most likely one. Consequently, the celebration of
Passover most probably has played a role as one of the elements defining who
was a Jew. In fact, it celebrates the beginning of this politeia/politeuma and
several “rebirths” of it throughout Jewish history. The same evocative quality
of this celebration depicted in FJ’s writings indicates that it was not merely a
utopian ideal, but a very concrete part of the common and communal Jewish
life.

The fact that FJ stresses the theme of unity and harmony in relation to
Passover could be considered as evidence of the probability of this hypothesis.
Another clue supporting this suggestion is the fact that one of the daily

38 Paul Spilsbury, The Image of the Jews in Flavius Josephus’ Paraphrase of the Bible
(TSAJ 69; Tübingen: Mohr, 1998), 217-230; Christine Gerber, Ein Bild des Judentums
für Nichtjuden von Flavius Josephus: Untersuchungen zu seiner Schrift Contra Apionem
(AGJU 40; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 367-379; Shaye J.D. Cohen, The Beginnings of
Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties (Berkeley: University of California,
1999), 341-349; Katell Berthelot, “Κοινωνία et Φιλανθρωπία dans le Contre Apion de
Siegert; MJSt 4; Münster: LIT, 1999), 94-123.
practices that FJ presents as part of their *politeia* is to pray twice a day, and the content of this prayer is giving thanks to God for having brought them out of Egypt, as well as asking that he continue to bless them. Consequently, if each day the remembrance of the first Passover was so fundamental to the identity of the Jews, its annual celebration should have also been at least as important as this daily practice.

Passover after the Destruction of Temple in 70 C.E.

The two glosses already mentioned (*Ant.* 2.313, 317), regarding the celebration of Passover and Unleavened Bread at the time FJ wrote *Ant.*, should now be analyzed.

In these passages, FJ affirms that “we” sacrifice (*θυομαυ*) up until his day, in the same manner as they did the time of the departure from Egypt. He continues that the feast is called “Passover,” and “they” keep for eight days a feast called feast of “unleavened bread.” The fact that he states that they eat unleavened bread did not raise any difficulty among the scholars, since it a custom not difficult to observe, but that instead they sacrifice the paschal victim was considered an anachronistic statement for the time when FJ is writing.

The major obstacle to plainly accepting this assertion is that the end of the sacrificial cult is normally connected with the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. Nevertheless, there are several clues suggesting that, perhaps, the sacrificial cult did not totally cease, but a minor form might have continued in an official and permanent way.

Even if the arguments *ex silentio* should be employed carefully, in this case it is truly surprising that the NT does not echo the end of the sacrificial era, and lacks any reference to the polemics that were common from the

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middle of the second century C.E. on. In addition, it is well-known that in the Diaspora, Passover was actually sacrificed as is demonstrated by the Elephantine papyri and the witness of Philo.

Consequently, it is not absurd to think that in this passage FJ was indeed referring to an actual practice of his day or to a desire to implement it. In fact, his presentation of Passover does not contradict or create any impediment to the realization of this feast after 70 C.E., it is enough to recall how he does not emphasize—as indicated above—the centralization of the cult.

The reference in the rabbinic literature to a certain man called Todos (v. Mo’ed Qat 3:1; 81d), probably Theodosious of Rome, who seems to have attempted to perform the paschal sacrifice in Rome, is a good example of what FJ and the Jews in Rome actually did, or proposed to do, even if the identification of Todos with FJ is highly implausible.

Conclusions

What appeared at the beginning of this research to be an evident statement, i.e., the utility of the pilgrim feast—according to FJ—in strengthening the Jewish identity, now appears as a manifold argument, which deserves attention in order to better appreciate FJ’s message.

First of all it seems quite clear that Passover was already a literary topos, capable of serving as a background for one of the most important concepts that FJ desires to convey, namely, that those who attempted to gain political independence, in reality brought destruction to the people. A consequence of this presentation is that the correct or incorrect interpretation

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41 Actually, Justin is frequently adduced as a witness of the end of the sacrificial cult after 70 C.E., but he reflects the situation after 135 C.E. when the sacrificial cult totally ceased.
42 Cf. Peter Schäfer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1997), 123-128; Spec. 2.145 where Philo affirms that the whole nation performs this rite; hence, it was also enacted in the Diaspora.
of the meaning of Passover outlines the boundary between the true and false members of the Jewish people.

This basic idea has other repercussions according to FJ’s account of the events. He tends to disengage Passover from its political implications and show that this feast strives primarily to strengthen a religious identity. This fact notwithstanding, Passover serves in FJ’s historiography —especially in *Ant.*— as a means to stake out the process of the gradual loss of political autonomy, which entails a correspondent crisis of identity.

FJ’s exposition of Passover also seems to endeavor to conceal certain differences in the way of celebrating the feast, while in regard to other aspects, he displays a great precision, e.g., in the indication of some calendric matters. This tendency, together with a certain relativity regarding the centralization of the cult, suggests that FJ desires to present the feast as feasible, even after the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E.

Bearing in mind that FJ insists on the significance of purity and of the *politeia/politeuma* in relating these arguments to Passover, it could be proposed that FJ considered Passover as one of the fundamental practices which were necessary to preserve and strengthen the Jewish identity. Hence, it is not at all surprising that he attempted to celebrate it in Rome, or at least, he proposed to observe it in order to invigorate the Jewish identity, which was most likely compromised after the great defeat in the war.