

Shared Interpretive Traditions of Joseph's 'σωφροσύνη' and 'Silence' in *De Iosepho* and the *Testament of Joseph*

Dieter Roth

Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz | dieter.roth@uni-mainz.de

JJMJS No. 1 (2014): 54–68

Introduction

Anyone who ventures into the writings of Philo is immediately struck by the sheer quantity of material that has come down to us from the pen of this ancient writer.¹ In the broadest classification, Philo's works contain writings dealing with biblical, philosophical, and historical-apologetic themes; however, in this article it is a biblically-themed work, *De Iosepho*, that is of particular interest.² The purpose in considering this treatise is not to gain insight into Philo's interpretive methodology or purposes in writing about Joseph more broadly,³

¹ Philo lived from ca. 20 B.C.E. to 50 C.E., which means that his literary output overlaps with the beginnings of Christianity. The little that is known about him is extrapolated from his own writings and the comments of Josephus (*Ant.* 18.159–160). Due to the massive number of extant treatises of Philo and the relative paucity of other source material from this era, David Runia has offered the image of Philo's works as a solitary skyscraper massively looming over other structures (see "How to Read Philo," *NedTT* 40 [1986]: 185; repr. in *Exegesis and Philosophy: Studies on Philo of Alexandria* [Hampshire: Variorum, 1990], 19).

² For an overview of Philo and his works see especially Peder Borgen, *Philo of Alexandria: An Exegete for his Time* (NovTSup 86. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997); idem, "Philo of Alexandria" in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus* (ed. Michael E. Stone; CRINT 2/2; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 233–82; Erwin R. Goodenough, *An Introduction to Philo Judaeus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940); Samuel Sandmel, *Philo of Alexandria: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); and Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.–A.D. 135)* (rev. and ed. G. Vermes, F. Millar and M. Goodman; 3 vols.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1973–1987), 3:809–90.

³ For discussions concerning Philo's method of interpretation see, e.g., Yehoshua Amir, "Authority and Interpretation of Scripture in the Writings of Philo," in *Mikra: Text,*

nor is it to discuss the manner in which Philo's presentation of the patriarch in this treatise seems to be quite different from his presentation of Joseph in *De Somniis II*,⁴ even though these issues are important and interesting. Rather, the point of the present study is to consider the way in which Philo shares common interpretative traditions regarding Joseph with the *Testament of Joseph* (hereafter *T. Jos.*), a text read and utilized by early Christian communities.⁵ In particular,

Translation, Reading & Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism & Early Christianity (ed. M. Mulder; CRINT 2/1; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984; repr., Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004), 421–53; idem, *Die hellenistische Gestalt des Judentums bei Philo von Alexandrien* (Forschungen zum jüdisch-christlichen Dialog; Neukirchen: Neukirchner Verlag, 1983); Francesca Calabi, *The Language and the Law of God: Interpretation and Politics in Philo of Alexandria* (South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998); Irmgard Christiansen, *Die Technik der allegorischen Auslegungswissenschaft bei Philon von Alexandrien* (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Biblischen Hermeneutik 7; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1969); Maren Niehoff, *The Figure of Joseph in Post-Biblical Jewish Literature* (AGJU 16; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), 54–83; Valentin Nikiprowetzky, *Le Commentaire de l'Écriture chez Philon d'Alexandrie* (ALGHJ 11; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977); Christian Noack, *Gottesbewußtsein: Exegetische Studien zur Soteriologie und Mystik bei Philo von Alexandria* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000); and Eckart Reinmuth, "Wunderbare Geburten: Zur Allegorese biblischer Erzählinhalte bei Philo von Alexandrien," in *Frühjudentum und Neues Testament im Horizont Biblischer Theologie* (ed. Wolfgang Kraus und Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr; WUNT 162; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 80–95.

⁴ The fact that *De Iosepho* presents a predominantly positive picture of Joseph whereas *De Somniis II* presents a primarily negative one has often been discussed in the scholarly literature. See, e.g., Jouette M. Bassler, "Philo on Joseph: The Basic Coherence of *De Iosepho* and *De Somniis ii*," *JSJ* 16 (1986): 240–55; Jacques Cazeaux, "Nul n'est Prophète en son Pays: Contribution à l'Étude de Joseph d'après Philon," in *The School of Moses: Studies in Philo and Hellenistic Religion* (ed. John Peter Kenny; Studia Philonica Monographs 1; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 41–81; Erwin R. Goodenough, *The Politics of Philo Judaeus: Practice and Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938); and Earle Hilgert, "The Dual Image of Joseph in Hebrew and Early Jewish Literature," in *Papers of the Chicago Society of Biblical Research*, vol. 30 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 5–21.

⁵ There is considerable debate concerning whether the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, of which *T. Jos.* is a part, is a Jewish writing interpolated by a Christian, an Essene writing with a few Christian interpolations, or a Christian writing drawing on Jewish sources. Though this issue is not unimportant, it is clear that in its final form the *Testaments* have distinctly Christian passages revealing the interest in and use of the text by early Christian communities. For discussion and bibliography on the issue see J. J. Collins, "Testaments," in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha,*

this article will consider Joseph's σωφροσύνη ("soundness of mind," "self-control," or "chastity")⁶ and his keeping silent about the misdeeds of others in *De Iosepho* and *T. Jos.* in order to highlight the shared interpretive context of Joseph traditions utilized in Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity. In the present examination I will seek to build on previous discussions of these interpretive traditions,⁷ and in the conclusion briefly comment on the importance of understanding Second Temple traditions as one of the historical contexts for interpretations of Joseph found in early Christianity.

Joseph's σωφροσύνη

The Use of the Term σωφροσύνη

An important initial observation, demonstrated in the sections below, is that in both Philo and *T. Jos.* the issue of Joseph's σωφροσύνη is directly connected to his confrontation with Potiphar's wife.⁸ Interestingly, however, the LXX account

Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus (ed. Michael E. Stone; CRINT 2/2; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 342–43. See also M. de Jonge, *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament as Part of Christian Literature: The Case of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs and the Greek Life of Adam and Eve* (SVTP 18; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003), 71–83 and his important observation on p. 82: "We shall have to admit that there is much that we do not know, and will perhaps never know, about the previous history of the Testaments. What we can and should do, however, is to take them seriously in their present Christian form."

⁶ For a full discussion of this term in Greek literature see Helen North, *Sophrosyne: Self-Knowledge and Self-Restraint in Greek Literature* (Cornell Studies in Classical Philology 35; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966).

⁷ See, e.g., Daniel J. Harrington, "Joseph in the Testament of Joseph, Pseudo-Philo, and Philo," in *Studies in the Testament of Joseph* (ed. G. W. E. Nickelsburg; SBLSCS 5; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975), 127–31; Harm W. Hollander, "The Ethical Character of the Patriarch Joseph," in *Studies in the Testament of Joseph* (ed. G. W. E. Nickelsburg; SBLSCS 5; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975), 64–65, 68–72; idem, *Joseph as an Ethical Model in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (SVTP 6; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 38–39, 42–47; and idem, "The Portrayal of Joseph in Hellenistic Jewish and Early Christian Literature," in *Biblical Figures Outside the Bible* (ed. Michael E. Stone and Theodore A. Bergern; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), 237–63.

⁸ Cf. Hollander, "Joseph in Hellenistic Jewish and Early Christian Literature," 241: "In literary contexts where Joseph's encounter with Potiphar's wife is at issue, one virtue comes to the fore: Joseph's 'temperance' or 'chastity' (σωφροσύνη)." James L. Kugel observes that "for various reasons, the encounter of Joseph and Potiphar's wife eventually came to be seen by ancient interpreters as *the* central episode of his life [emphasis original]" (*Traditions of the Bible* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998], 442; see

of this confrontation (Gen 39:7–12) never utilizes this term. Even when considering the entire Joseph story as recorded in Gen 37–50 of the LXX, the term cannot be found. Indeed, the word does not appear anywhere in the LXX other than in the Apocrypha, though, significantly, it is applied to Joseph in 4 Maccabees.⁹ In the NT it appears in only three places,¹⁰ and only in the two occurrences in 1 Timothy is it used to describe a character trait.¹¹ Given the relative paucity of the term, it is notable that this quality of Joseph’s character is of such paramount importance for Philo and the author of *T. Jos.*¹²

Joseph’s σωφροσύνη in De Iosepho

In *Ios.* 40 Philo tells the reader that Potiphar’s wife, driven to madness because of the beauty of Joseph and without restraint in the frenzy of her passion, “made proposals of intercourse to him which he stoutly resisted and utterly refused to accept, so strong was the sense of decency and temperance [σωφροσύνην] which nature and the exercise of control had implanted in him.”¹³ Joseph goes on to make a lengthy speech in which he extols the sexual chastity of the Hebrews and states, “To this day I have remained pure, and I will not take the first step in transgression by committing adultery, the greatest of crimes” (*Ios.* 44).

also Kugel’s comments in *In Potiphar’s House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990], 22–26). It is worth noting, however, that in Acts 7 and Heb 11 the NT does not mention Joseph’s encounter with Potiphar’s wife when discussing this patriarch.

⁹ There are three occurrences of the term in the Apocrypha, namely, Add Esth B:3, 2 Macc 4:37, and Wis 8:7. It figures prominently in 4 Macc where the term appears in 4 Macc 1:3, 6, 18, 30, 31; 5:23. The adjective σωφρων is used in 4 Macc 2:2 in a description of Joseph, and also appears in 4 Macc 1:35; 2:16, 18, 23; 3:17, 19; 15:10. It is this 4 Macc 2:2 passage that Hollander has in mind when he refers to σωφροσύνη as “a motif that is traditionally connected with Joseph” (*Joseph as an Ethical Model*, 38; cf. idem, “Joseph in Hellenistic Jewish and Early Christian Literature,” 241). References that Joseph restrained from committing sin (Wis 10:13–14) or kept the commandment (1 Macc 2:53) may also refer to this virtue though without specifically using the term σωφροσύνη.

¹⁰ Acts 26:25 and 1 Tim 2:9, 15. The adjective σωφρων is used in 1 Tim 3:2 and Titus 1:8; 2:2, 5.

¹¹ In Acts 26 it is used to describe the “rational” nature of Paul’s words to Festus.

¹² Though these two texts, and the interpretive traditions found therein, are of primary concern here, there are, of course, other texts that also highlight Joseph’s σωφροσύνη in extended discussions. Cf., e.g., Josephus, *Ant.* 2.39–59 and the reference in *Ios. Asen.* 4:9.

¹³ The Greek text and translation here and throughout is that of *Philo: Volume VI: On Abraham, On Joseph, On Moses* (trans. F. H. Colson; LCL 289; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935).

Furthermore, giving in to the advances of Potiphar's wife would not only be adultery, but would be adultery with his *master's* wife, and Joseph says that he is "called on to honour him not only as a master but further as a benefactor" (*Ios.* 46). Joseph, in no uncertain terms, protests even the thought of committing a sin that would be the "greatest crime" of adultery and a violation of his master's honor.

Having introduced the idea of Joseph's σωφροσύνη in the encounter with Potiphar's wife, Philo mentions this virtue twice more in *De Iosepho*. First, in the allegorical interpretation of Joseph's actions as related to the statesman,¹⁴ Philo writes, "If the results of licentiousness are civil strife and war, and ill upon ill without number, clearly the results of continence [σωφροσύνης] are stability and peace and the acquisition and enjoyment of perfect blessing" (*Ios.* 57). Second, having returned to the retelling of the narrative of Genesis, Philo writes that Joseph, while in jail,

by setting before them his life of temperance [σωφροσύνης] and every virtue, like an original picture of skilled workmanship, he converted even those who seemed to be quite incurable, who as long-standing distempers of their soul abated reproached themselves for their past and repented with such utterances as these: "Ah, where in old days was this great blessing which at first we failed to find? See, when it shines on us we behold as in a mirror our misbehaviour and are ashamed." (*Ios.* 87)

Notice particularly that Philo specifically mentions σωφροσύνη and then merely groups together all the other virtues displayed by Joseph. Clearly, it is the concept of self-control that has gripped Philo's mind as one of the predominant characteristics of Joseph.

¹⁴ Philo views the account of Joseph as being an account of the statesman (*Ios.* 1), and therefore the allegorical sections of *De Iosepho* relate to the life of a statesman/politician. In *Ios.* 28–36 Philo argues that Joseph was well-suited to be a politician because his name means "addition of the Lord" just as the political structure of states is something added to the law of nature. For discussion of the meaning of this phrase, see Valentin Nikiprowetzky, "ΚΥΡΙΟΥ ΠΡΟΣΘΕΣΙΣ: Note Critique sur Philon d'Alexandrie, *De Iosepho*, 28," *REJ* 127 (1968): 387–92.

Joseph's σωφροσύνη in T. Jos.

In the first section of *T. Jos.* (1:1–10:4), the author depicts Joseph's struggle to avoid being seduced by Potiphar's wife.¹⁵ Here again one finds a strong emphasis on Joseph's self-control in the face of temptation.¹⁶ In *T. Jos.* 4:1–2 Joseph recounts,

How often, then did she flatter me with words as a holy man, deceitfully praising my self-control [σωφροσύνην] through her words in the presence of her husband, but when we were alone she sought to seduce me. Publicly she honored me for my self-control [σώφρονα], while privately she said to me, "Have no fear of my husband, for he is convinced of your chastity [σωφροσύνης] so that even if someone were to tell him about you, he would not believe it."¹⁷

When Potiphar's wife tries to seduce him by "food mixed with enchantments" (*T. Jos.* 6:1), Joseph rebukes her saying, "In order for you to learn that the evil of the irreligious will not triumph over those who exercise self-control [σωφροσύνη] in their worship of God, I will take this and eat it in your presence"

¹⁵ It is generally recognized that *T. Jos.* utilizes two separate sources in describing the life of Joseph, though whether the sources were brought together by a single redactor or reveal the presence of more than one stage of composition has been debated in the scholarly literature. Once again, the issue does not affect the present study's focus on the text in its final form. A brief overview of the different views and those advocating them can be found in H. Dixon Singerland, "The Testament of Joseph: A Redaction-Critical Study," *JBL* 96 (1977): 507–8.

¹⁶ The character trait is so prominent in *T. Jos.* that, as Hollander and de Jonge observe, "It is not surprising therefore that *T. Jos.* received the title *περὶ σωφροσύνης* in *bldmef* [manuscripts of the text]" (*The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Commentary* [SVTP 8; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985], 364). Though the other testaments in *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* will not be discussed here, George W. E. Nickelsburg has rightly commented that the figure of Joseph "is also prominent throughout the *Testaments* as an example of virtue and the avoidance of vice" (*Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981], 233). Hollander similarly notes, "For the author of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, it is Joseph above all who represents the ideal of moral behavior" ("The Portrayal of Joseph in Hellenistic Jewish and Early Christian Literature," 254–55).

¹⁷ The English translation here and throughout is that of H. C. Kee, *OTP* 1:819–25. For the Greek text see M. de Jonge, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Critical Edition of the Greek Text* (PVTG 1; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978).

(*T. Jos.* 6:7). He then prays, eats, and remains unaffected. While in prison, Joseph recalls,

Many times she sent messages to me saying, “Acquiesce in fulfilling my desire, and I will release you from the fetters and liberate you from the darkness.” Not even in my mind did I yield to her, for God loves more the one who is faithful in self-control [σωφροσύνη] in a dark cistern than the one who in royal chambers feast on delicacies with excess. If a man strives from self-control [σωφροσύνη] and at the same time desires glory—and the Most High knows that it is appropriate for him—he brings it about for him, even as he did for me. (*T. Jos.* 9:1–3)

Finally, when it comes time to exhort his children concerning the lessons learned from these experiences, Joseph admonishes them with the words,

So you see, my children, how great are the things that patience and prayer with fasting accomplish. You also, if you pursue self-control [σωφροσύνη] and purity with patience and prayer with fasting in humility of heart, the Lord will dwell among you, because he loves self-control [σωφροσύνη]. And where the Most High dwells, even if envy befall someone, or slavery of false accusation, the Lord who dwells with him on account of his self-control [σωφροσύνη] not only will rescue him from these evils, but will exalt him and glorify him and he did for me. (*T. Jos.* 10:1–3)

Comparison of Philo and T. Jos.

Given the fact that the biblical account of Joseph’s interaction with Potiphar’s wife never mentions his σωφροσύνη, nor, for that matter, is there a particularly great emphasis upon his “self-control” beyond the statement that he resisted her advances, it is quite interesting that both Philo and *T. Jos.* repeatedly use this word to describe Joseph’s prominent character trait. Quite clearly, this term at

some point entered the interpretive tradition surrounding Joseph and thus made its way into both of these accounts.¹⁸

Although one cannot be certain, it is possible that a slight shift in emphasis in the Joseph story led to the subsequent prominence of Joseph's σωφροσύνη in post-biblical tradition. In the Genesis account the reason that Joseph provides for not succumbing to the advances of Potiphar's wife is, "Look, with me here, my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my hand. He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen 39:8–9 NRSV). Joseph does not here begin his response with any mention of the sexual immorality of giving in to the desires of Potiphar's wife. In fact, though it is probable that some conception of the inherent wickedness of committing adultery is part of Joseph's concluding question ("How then shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"), the primary emphasis of Joseph's words rests on his abhorrence of the idea of breaking his master's trust through the ultimate act of disrespect in appropriating his master's wife to himself.¹⁹

In Philo, however, as was noted above, Joseph's speech begins with a lengthy exposition on sexual chastity and the evil of committing the "greatest crime" of adultery. It is only subsequently that Philo mentions any distress that Joseph had related to disrespecting Potiphar.²⁰ In *T. Jos.* the contrast with Genesis is even stronger in that the *only* sin Joseph is concerned with is that of adultery—a concern with showing contempt for Potiphar is never even mentioned. Thus, in Philo, the primary concern of Joseph in the Genesis account has been relegated to a secondary consideration, and in *T. Jos.* it has entirely disappeared from the account. The shift from a primary concern of not disrespecting Potiphar to a primary concern of not committing sexual immorality may account for the fact that it is not Joseph's "respect for a person

¹⁸ Harrington concludes that both Philo and *T. Jos.* are "transmitting some Alexandrian exegetical traditions" ("Joseph," 130). As already noted above, these are not the only two Second Temple texts mentioning this virtue of Joseph.

¹⁹ So also Harrington, "Joseph," 127.

²⁰ It seems, therefore, that Deborah Sills's comment that in Philo, "Joseph emerges as a youth who understands that his first responsibility is to his master" may place too much emphasis on the issue that appears only secondarily in the text ("Strange Bedfellows: Politics and Narrative in Philo," in *The Seductiveness of Jewish Myth: Challenge or Response?* [ed. S. Daniel Breslauer; Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997], 177–78).

of authority” that is presented as his primary character trait, but rather his “control of his desires.”²¹

The Silence of Joseph Concerning the Misdeeds of Others

Having considered a first point of contact between *De Iosepho* and *T. Jos.*, I now turn to a second, and in some ways more surprising, common interpretive tradition found in these two works. In the first example, although the term σωφροσύνη does not appear in the biblical account of Joseph’s refusal of Potiphar’s wife, it is not difficult to see how such an emphasis could arise out a story in which, for whatever reason, Joseph snubbed a woman enticing him to commit adultery. However, a second example, involving the silence of Joseph concerning the misdeeds of others,²² is significantly more difficult to understand in the light of Gen 40:14–15. In these verses Joseph, in the dialogue with the cupbearer after Joseph had interpreted his dream, says, “But remember me when it is well with you; please do me the kindness to make mention of me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this place. For in fact I was stolen out of the land of the Hebrews; and here also I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon.” More will be said on this point below in the comparison between the theme of Joseph’s silence in Philo and *T. Jos.* At this point, however, in order to be able to make such a comparison and understand how the use of the theme relates to Gen 40:14–15, it is first necessary to consider the specific passages where the theme of Joseph keeping secret what others have done to him appears.

Joseph’s Silence in De Iosepho

In *De Iosepho*, Joseph’s silence figures prominently just after Joseph reveals his true identity to his brothers.²³ Philo writes that once they recovered from the shock of the revelation, “The brothers, letting their tongues run freely, ceased not to sound his praise point by point” (*Ios.* 246). A key component of this panegyric for Joseph is their praise for the “pre-eminent self-restraint of his modest reticence” (*Ios.* 246) as demonstrated by the fact that

²¹ It is interesting to note in passing that the idea that Joseph was concerned primarily about avoiding the sin of adultery is also highlighted in *Jub.* 39:5–7.

²² As will be seen, *T. Jos.* has Joseph keeping secret a variety of misdeeds, whereas Philo focuses on his not having revealed what his brothers did to him.

²³ Philo foreshadows the issue of Joseph’s silence prior to Joseph’s revealing himself to his brothers by stating that Joseph thought it best that no Egyptian should be present at the first recognition so that no reproach might come upon his brothers (see *Ios.* 237).

He had passed through all these vicissitudes, yet neither while in slavery did he denounce his brothers for selling him nor when he was haled to prison did he in his despondency disclose any secret, nor during his long stay there make any revelations of the usual kind, since prisoners are apt to descant upon their personal misfortunes. He behaved as though he knew nothing of his past experiences, and not even when he was interpreting their dreams, to the eunuchs of the king, though he had a suitable opportunity for disclosing the facts, did he say a word about his own high lineage. Nor yet, when he was appointed to be the king's viceroy and was charged with the superintendence and headship over all Egypt, did he say anything to prevent the belief that he was of obscure and ignoble station. . . . (*Ios.* 247–248)

It should be noted that Philo seems to indicate the reason why he insists that Joseph kept secret what his brothers had done to him by writing, “In fact the story of their [the brothers'] conspiracy and selling of him to slavery was so completely unknown and remained so secret that the chiefs of the Egyptians rejoiced to hear that the brothers of the governor had now for the first time come to visit him” (*Ios.* 250).

Joseph's Silence in T. Jos.

In the second section of *T. Jos.* (10:5–18:4), the primary focus is on Joseph's silence, and the text even has Joseph introducing the description of all the circumstances in which he kept silent with the words, “I did not arouse myself with evil design, but honored my brothers, and out of regard for them even when they sold me I was silent rather than tell the Ishmaelites that I was the son of Jacob, a great and righteous man” (*T. Jos.* 10:6). This statement is followed by the recounting of Joseph's experiences with the slave-traders and coming into Potiphar's house, in which Joseph four times makes reference to keeping silent about the misdeeds of others.

First, immediately after having been sold into slavery, Joseph says, “As I was going with the Ishmaelites, they kept asking me, ‘Are you a slave?’ And I replied, ‘I am a slave out of a household,’ so as not to disgrace my brothers. The greatest of them said to me ‘You are not a slave; even your appearance discloses that.’ But I told them that I was a slave” (*T. Jos.* 11:2–3). Upon arriving in Egypt the Ishmaelites agree to leave Joseph with a trader, whose business prospers greatly during the three months that Joseph is there.

However, Potiphar's wife becomes aware of Joseph's presence in the household of the trader and tells Potiphar that a young Hebrew had been stolen from the land of Canaan. She entreats Potiphar to go and "work justice" concerning Joseph, which would result in the blessing of his own household. It is after Potiphar becomes involved that the second occurrence of Joseph's silence is mentioned. The account reads:

Pentephris²⁴ said [to the trader] "Bring in the young man." When I entered I prostrated myself before Pentephris, for he was third in rank among Pharaoh's officers. And taking me aside from the trader he said to me, "Are you a slave or a freeman?" I said to him, "A slave." He said, "Of whom?" I replied, "Of the Ishmaelites." He said, "How did you become a slave?" And I said, "They bought me out of the land of Canaan." But he said to me, "You are really lying." And immediately he ordered that I also be stripped and whipped. (*T. Jos.* 13:5-9)

Twenty-four days later the Ishmaelites returned to the trader, and having heard that Jacob was mourning over a lost son, inquire of Joseph why he told them that he was a slave, because they now know that he is the son of a great man²⁵ and that his father is mourning for him in sackcloth and ashes. Joseph's response is the third instance in which his silence is highlighted: "When I heard this my inner being was dissolved and my heart melted, and I wanted to weep very much, but I restrained myself so as not to bring disgrace on my brothers. So I said to them, 'I know nothing; I am a slave.'" (*T. Jos.* 15:3-4).

The fourth, and final, incident in which Joseph keeps silent about the misdeeds of others is different from the first three in that up to this point Joseph's silence has been about the actions of his brothers. However, when Potiphar's wife sends a eunuch to buy Joseph at any price, "the eunuch went and gave them eighty pieces of gold and took me away, but he told the Egyptian

²⁴ In *T. Jos.* Potiphar is called "Pentephris," and his wife is referred to as "the Memphian woman" or "the Egyptian woman."

²⁵ Although it will not be discussed further here, it is noteworthy that both Philo and the author make reference to the idea that Joseph is the "son of a great man" (*T. Jos.* 15:2) or "of a high lineage" (*Jos.* 248). In their encomium of Joseph it is apparent that they desire not only to show forth Joseph's own character by the manner in which he conducts himself, but also to present Joseph as hailing from noble lineage.

woman he had paid a hundred” (*T. Jos.* 16:5). Joseph says, “Although I knew the facts, I kept quiet in order not to bring the eunuch under disgrace” (*T. Jos.* 16:5). Here Joseph’s concern for the disgrace of others extends beyond his own family to a complete stranger who is a fellow-servant in Potiphar’s house.

Comparison of Philo and T. Jos.

Once again both Philo and *T. Jos.* present a shared interpretive tradition, but the manner in which this tradition appears in the respective writings is quite different from the situation observed in the first case, where a particular character trait of Joseph appeared in a similar context and for a similar purpose. In the case of Joseph’s silence, however, there are only minimal points in which the two narratives are in agreement, and these points are overshadowed by rather significant differences.²⁶ Indeed, the only aspects which are common to the accounts in *De Iosepho* and *T. Jos.* are the fact that Joseph kept secret what had happened to him and that he did so out of respect for his brothers. Of greater interest are the ways in which the two accounts diverge.

First, in *De Iosepho*, Philo does not mention Joseph having kept secret what his brothers did to him until the brothers are in Egypt and are reunited with Joseph. In fact, it is the brothers themselves who praise Joseph for the manner in which he conducted himself by not denouncing them or revealing the secret of how he came to Egypt. It is interesting, though, that Philo writes that Joseph is praised for keeping silent while in slavery, while in jail, and while interpreting the dreams—though here it is said that he kept silent concerning his high lineage—as all of these are circumstances *after* the time when he came into Potiphar’s house.²⁷ Thus, it is only at the conclusion of the Joseph story that, in retrospect, Joseph is praised for his silence. In *T. Jos.*, on the other hand, Joseph is scarcely in the hands of the Ishmaelites before he begins hiding his true identity and all four occurrences of Joseph keeping silent are said to have occurred *before* Joseph arrives in Potiphar’s house.²⁸

²⁶ The different manner in which the tradition of Joseph’s silence is used in *De Iosepho* and *T. Jos.* may indicate that this tradition was not directly tied to any one specific event, as was the case with Joseph’s σωφροσύνη.

²⁷ It is, of course, possible that the reference to the time while Joseph was “in slavery” begins as soon as he is sold to the Ishmaelites; however, it is still noteworthy that every other circumstance is clearly from the time after having been sold into Potiphar’s house.

²⁸ Though often providing several helpful observations, Hollander also writes, “Philo and T. Joseph differ in that the latter connects the motif [of Joseph’s silence] much more obviously with Joseph’s silence before his kingship” (“The Ethical Character,” 70; restated in *Joseph as an Ethical Model*, 45). Philo’s comments in *Ios.* 247–248, quoted above, reveal

This differing focus on events before or after Joseph arrives in Potiphar's house results in a second major difference. Philo comments that Joseph is praised for his silence only in circumstances that are known to the reader from the Genesis account (i.e., Joseph in slavery, in jail, and while interpreting dreams); however, in *T. Jos.* Joseph's silence takes place within a narrative of events concerning which the biblical text is silent.²⁹ Thus, Philo's use of this interpretive tradition can be understood within the context of the Genesis narrative whereas the use of the tradition in *T. Jos.* necessitates a whole series of events not mentioned in the biblical account.³⁰

A third significant difference between *De Iosepho* and *T. Jos.* is the reason why the issue of Joseph's silence is introduced into the texts. As already mentioned above, for Philo, Joseph's silence explains how it could be that Pharaoh and his officers were pleased to hear that Joseph's brothers had come. When reading the Joseph story, it is not difficult to imagine Philo, or a previous Second Temple interpreter, puzzling over Gen 45:16 and the account that Pharaoh and his officials were pleased at the report that Joseph's brothers had come. A possible route to the interpretive tradition of Joseph's silence could be as follows: "Why would Pharaoh and his officials be pleased that the men who had done this horrible deed of selling Joseph into slavery had come to Egypt? Unless, of course, they were unaware of what Joseph's brothers had done. But why would they be unaware of what had happened to Joseph? Of course! They did not know because Joseph never told them." Thus, though Philo has the brothers praise Joseph for not having denounced them, it may very well be that the reason Joseph's silence is even mentioned in the first place is to explain a difficulty found in the Genesis account. In *T. Jos.*, however, there is no hint that the author knew about, or if he knew was concerned with, a potential interpretive link between Joseph's silence and the difficulty perceived to be present in Gen 45:16. Rather, the reason Joseph's silence is mentioned is in order to have Joseph say,

that it is not subsequent to Joseph's rising to the "kingship" that Joseph's silence becomes important; rather, the difference lies in the primary connection of the motif to the time before or after Joseph's arrival in Potiphar's house.

²⁹ In Gen 27:28, 36 the narrative simply states that Joseph went from the hands of the Ishmaelites to Potiphar. Between vv. 28 and 36 the narrative recounts what Reuben and Joseph's brothers did (Reuben went back to get Joseph and sees that he is gone, the brothers tear and bloody Joseph's coat, and they tell Jacob that Joseph had been mauled by wild animals).

³⁰ It is also interesting that Philo seems to mention Joseph's silence more in passing while the entire second half of *T. Jos.* is structured around this tradition.

So you see, my children, how many things I endured in order not to bring my brothers into disgrace. You, therefore, love one another and in patient endurance conceal one another's shortcomings. God is delighted by harmony among brothers and by the intention of a kind heart that takes pleasure in goodness. (*T. Jos.* 17:1–3)³¹

Therefore, *T. Jos.* views Joseph's silence as a demonstration of a kind and good heart that exhibits love for others by concealing their misdeeds. Once again, the author of *T. Jos.* then uses Joseph's example as the basis for exhortation.

Fourth, it is quite intriguing to find the story of Joseph having kept secret the eunuch's dishonesty in *T. Jos.* Clearly, Philo is only concerned with mentioning Joseph's silence as it relates to what his brothers had done, and up to 16:5, the same emphasis is present in *T. Jos.* The introduction of the eunuch, and Joseph not revealing his dishonesty, is curious, particularly in light of the fact that the exhortation immediately following involves loving one another in the context of "harmony among brothers." Although the eunuch is clearly not Joseph's brother, perhaps the account is present in order to expand the idea of "love for one another" in order to give the concept broader import.

Finally, before concluding this comparison, a few words need to be said about the relationship of the interpretive tradition of Joseph's silence to Gen 40:15. Even though Philo technically only says that Joseph did not say a word "about his own high lineage" when interpreting the dreams of Pharaoh's servants in jail, and *T. Jos.* only recounts that Joseph kept silent about others' misdeeds before he came into Potiphar's house, it is still surprising to find such a strong interpretive tradition about Joseph's silence when the Genesis account clearly has Joseph telling the cupbearer that he had been "stolen by theft out of the land of the Hebrews" (Gen 40:15). That Joseph told no one else in Pharaoh's household is quite possible, and since the cupbearer forgot about Joseph after being restored to his position, Joseph's subsequent silence could still be used as the explanation for why Pharaoh was pleased when Joseph's brothers arrived. It is more difficult, however, to understand the praise of Joseph enduring so many hardships just to avoid disgracing his brothers (as is the case in *T. Jos.*), when the

³¹ This theme is also found in the HB in passages such as Prov 10:12 ("Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses," NRSV) and 17:9 ("Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends," ESV). In the NT one may be reminded of 1 Pet 4:8 ("Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins," NRSV).

biblical account, in such a matter-of-fact manner, reveals that keeping complete silence about his circumstances was not first and foremost in Joseph's mind. In fact, in an attempt to find a way out of jail, Joseph apparently has no qualms revealing to the cupbearer that he was brought unjustly to Egypt and now is imprisoned unjustly in Egypt.

Conclusion

At this point, it is interesting to note that *De Iosepho*, a text written by an Alexandrian Jew, and *T. Jos.*, a text used in early Christian communities, share two particular interpretive traditions concerning Joseph in their accounts of this patriarch. Though it has been seen that the utilization of the traditions in the two texts is not identical, it is noteworthy that in both their similarities and differences these texts highlight a phenomenon evident in numerous other texts as well, namely the shared interpretive context of texts utilized in Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity.³² Therefore, the foregoing discussion does not merely provide insight into interpretive traditions in two Second Temple texts, but also provides some of the context for understanding the figure of Joseph in early Christianity—a context that cannot be fully appreciated apart from an awareness of Second Temple literature.

³² Interestingly, there are only two explicit references to the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* in early patristic literature: one by Origen and one by Jerome (see Harm W. Hollander, “The Influence of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs in the Early Church: Joseph as Model in Prochorus’ Acts of John,” *OLP* 9 [1978]: 75). At the same time, the idea of Joseph keeping himself chaste subsequently appears in the writings of several church fathers including Clement of Alexandria (*Paed.* 3.11), Origen (*Cels.* 4.46), Eusebius (*Comm. Ps.* 25:1), and Asterius of Amasea (*Homily* 6.4). See also, A. W. Argyle, “Joseph the Patriarch in Patristic Teaching,” *ExpTim* 67 (1955–1956): 199–201. Also worth perusing is de Jonge’s chapter “The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs as a Document Transmitted by Christians,” in *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, 84–106, esp. pp. 102–5.