"NOT ENOUGH": ΕΠΙΠΟΛΑΙΩΣ IN 3 MACCABEES 2:31

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In the recent discussion about Judaism in antiquity, its variants, and Jewish identity, the Third Book of Maccabees plays an important role, because it addresses questions concerning Jewish-Greek relationships in the diaspora explicitly.¹ It has been argued that the author of 3 Maccabees has a strong "sense of solidarity with Jews in Judaea", and that "Egypt is for him a foreign residence and not a home".²

In this short note, I shall not enter into the general question whether Jews outside Judea experienced their existence as that of exiled foreigners, nor shall I argue here that the feeling of estrangement expressed in 3 Maccabees may be less prominent than sometimes assumed.³ In these pages, I shall only discuss half a verse from 3 Maccabees, 2:31a, which is sometimes construed as an important statement on these matters, but which is, in my view, frequently misunderstood.

In an article of 1996, D.R. Schwartz took 3 Maccabees 2:31 as an indication that there were a number of Jews in ancient Egypt, who experienced their situation in the diaspora as that of an exile, and that they considered Jerusalem as their proper home. Schwartz, referring to the common interpretation of the verse, states that 3 Macc. 2:31 describes those Jews who consented to join in an Alexandrian cult in order to gain Alexandrian citizenship. This option was taken, we are told, only by those few Jews who ιασ τῆς πολείς εὐσεβείας επιβαθρᾶς στυγνοίτες—"who objected strongly to the price the city had to pay for the practice of its religion" or who "grudg[ed] the price of their city's religion". "Their

² Barclay, ibid., 198-199.
city" is Jerusalem. Judaism is the piety of the city, and its price was estrangement from the Alexandrian polity and willingness to pay the price demanded by the sanctity of Jerusalem. 4

This reconstruction of the tenor of 3 Maccabees in my opinion rests on an erroneous interpretation of 3 Macc. 2:31a. This error has a long history in modern scholarship, 5 but it is susceptible of correction.

A number of current interpretations of this passage are debatable, to say the least. If my suspicion is right, however, the basic error is that εὐσεβεία is understood as "piety", so that the city with which this "piety" (a virtue, after all) is associated, must be Jerusalem. However, if εὐσεβεία is taken in a less pregnant meaning, namely "religion", there is no obstacle whatsoever to understand τῆς πόλεως εὐσεβείας as "of the religion of the city", namely Alexandria, which is exactly the meaning which the context requires.

In 3 Macc. 2:25-30 it is related that king Ptolemy IV Philopator (222-205 B.C.E.) returned from Jerusalem, where he had suffered humiliation in the temple. Furious, he ordered that all Judeans in Egypt should be registered as slaves. Only those who were prepared to convert to the mysteries, would be isopolitai to the Alexandrians (2:30). In 3 Macc. 2:31 it is said that some of the Alexandrian Jews unscrupulously accepted king Ptolemy's offer of citizenship, apparently because they had but little respect for the traditional Jewish religion. The Greek text reads as follows: 6

"Ενιαίο μὲν οὖν ἐπιπολαιῶς τὰς τῆς πόλεως εὐσεβείας ἐπιβάθρας στυγνόντες εὐχερῶς ἑκτούς ἐδίδοσαν ὡς μεγάλης τινὸς κοινωνίας ἐυκλείας ἀπὸ τῆς ἐσομένης τῷ βασιλεί ἑυρίσκοντος ἐνοπτομήνα." 7

The main clause poses no problems: "they gave themselves unscrupu-

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5 It occurs already in Grotius' Annotationes; Grotius, however, did not know yet the reading επιπολαιῶς.
6 Textually, this passage is in order; there is no reason for emendation to make sense of it (against Barclay, The Jews, 195). In some manuscripts, ἐπισκόλως (in many manuscripts understood as ἐπί πόλεως, and corrected to ἐπί πόλιν in one manuscript) is read instead of ἐπιπολαιῶς. The spelling with α at accounts for all variants, and is well attested.
7 R. Hanhart (ed.), Maccabaeorum liber III (Göttinger Septuaginta), Göttingen 1960. The same text is offered in the current editions by H.B. Swete (omitting only οὖν) and A. Rahlfis.