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## A Jewish family in Ptolemaic Thebes

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The Journal of Juristic Papyrology 32, 7-9

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2002

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Willy Clarysse

### A JEWISH FAMILY IN PTOLEMAIC THEBES

CPj I 77, 78 AND 79 ARE THREE RECEIPTS for payment to the granary in Diospolis Magna, dated in 158, 155 and 151 BC. Payers are Straton son of Straton and his brother Isakis. The name Isakis clearly points to a Jew; the Greek name Straton was favoured by Jews and other Semites alike. Tcherikover and Fuks did not include a third text, *O. Wilck.* 731, dated in 153, though Wilcken's reading *Κακίς* was corrected into *Ἰσακίς* in *BL II.1*, p. 75.

We may now add two demotic texts to this dossier. One is another grain receipt, published as *O. Mattha* 233 and attributed by him to Kom Ombo because it contains a reference to the feeding place of the ibis. Taxpayer is a certain *ʒyšhg* son of *Sbrbwns*. Mattha rightly identified the name as a transcription of Jewish Isaak, but misread the patronymic, which on the original in Vienna clearly reads *Strtwn* i.e. Straton.<sup>1</sup> The other is a so-called *r-rh-w* ostrakon, which extends the family tree by one generation.

The whole dossier can be presented as follows:

Text	Date	Tax-payers	Tax	Place
<i>O. Bodl.</i> 158 = CPj I 77	30 March 158	Straton son of Straton	ὑπὲρ τοῦ τόπου	Diospolis Magna

<sup>1</sup> The correction was made independently by G. R. HUGHES (see *ZÄS* 126 [1999], p. 42 n. 6) and in the *Demotisches Namenbuch*, p. 949. The combination is found again for a Jewish farmer in the Fayum AD b. 101/102: Straton also called Isak(is) (CPj III 428, col. I, 7 [Fayum, AD 101]).

Text	Date	Tax-payers	Tax	Place
<i>O. dem. Brooklyn</i> 12768 -1672, <i>ZÄS</i> 126 [1999], p.48 no.9	9 Febr. 156	Υῖ son of Joseph, Isaak son of Straton, Straton son of Ὶῖ	10 arouras	Memnoneia
<i>O. Bodl.</i> 163 = <i>CPJ</i> I 78	30 March 155	Straton son of Straton and Isakis		Diospolis Magna
<i>O. Wilcken</i> 731	9 July 153	Isakis	νῆσος Πρωο	Diospolis Magna
<i>O. Mattha</i> 233	153/152	Isaak son of Straton	food for the ibis	<i>s. l.</i>
<i>O. Bodl.</i> 164 = <i>CPJ</i> I 79	19 June 151	Isakis son of Straton	barley (?)	Diospolis Magna

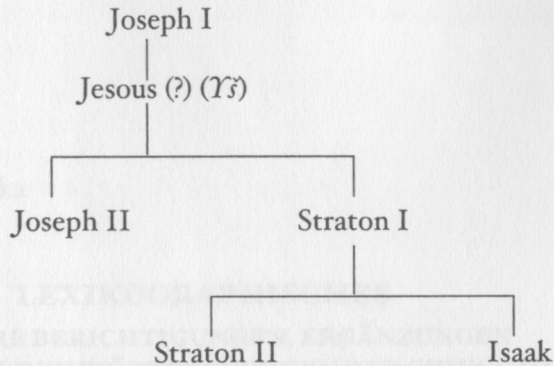
Isaak has a traditional Jewish name,<sup>2</sup> which is hellenised to Isakis in the Greek receipts, but the demotic receipt *O. Mattha* 233 shows that the actual pronunciation was ʒyšḥg, with *shin* and *het*. The same holds true for the name Υῖ, which the editor renders as Jesse; I prefer to see it as a short form of Jes(ous) (Υῖwc), which was a common name, also in Ptolemaic Edfou, whereas Jesse, the name of the father of king David is no longer found in the hellenistic period.<sup>3</sup> The common name Joses, a shortened form of Iosephos, is written with *s*, not with *shin*. Apparently the persons in question were not simply hellenised Jews, but they actually spoke Aramaic, using sounds that do not occur in Greek.<sup>4</sup> Their tax receipts were in Greek, but also in demotic, and most surprising of all, Isakis paid for the “food of the (sacred) ibis”. Probably this meant nothing more than that he cultivated a plot of sacred land belonging to an ibis shrine, but even this is a remarkable feature of integration for a Jew.

<sup>2</sup> For the name, see now TAL ILAN, *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity, Part I: Palestine 300 BCE – 200 CE*, Tübingen 2001.

<sup>3</sup> With thanks to G. BOHAK for his advice in this matter.

<sup>4</sup> The recent find of some Aramaic papyri in Tebtynis proves that Aramaic was still used by the Semitic diaspora in the Egyptian countryside; cf. C. GALLAZZI, *Tebtynis I. La reprise des fouilles et le quartier de la chapelle d'Isis-Thermouthis, Fouilles franco-italiennes*, Le Caire 2000, p. 31.

The Brooklyn ostrakon is a receipt for Jes(ous) son of Joseph, Isaak son of Straton and Straton son of Jes(ous) for a field that earlier belonged to Joseph son of Jes(ous). Since all these people were no doubt members of a single family, the following stemma can be reconstructed :



Joseph I and II are dead by 156 BC, but Jes(ous), his son Straton I and his grandson Straton II jointly cultivate 10 arouras of grain land. The names are all Jewish except for Straton, which is Greek, though much favoured by people from Phoenicia and Syria, including Jews,<sup>5</sup> no doubt because it has an assonance with the Canaanite goddess Astarte.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, *CPJ*. And the recent *P. Polit. Iud.*, where the name occurs three times.

<sup>6</sup> For Straton as a popular name in Phoenicia, see e.g. M. HENGEL, *Judentum und Hellenismus. Studien zu ihrer Begegnung unter besonderen Berücksichtigung Palästinas bis zur Mitte des 2. Jh. v. Chr.*, (= *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 10), Tübingen 1969, p. 114 and n. 25.