Annette Weissenrieder

A roadmap to heaven: High-priestly vestments and the Jerusalem Temple in Flavius Josephus

In this chapter, I examine the architecture of the Jerusalem temple and of priestly vestments as loci of religious innovation, which were embedded in Josephus' complex political and religious agenda. I also offer an exploration of Josephus' ekphrastic treatment of the architectural complexities of the First and Second Temple and the vestments of the priests and high priests. As I maintain, not only do the priestly and high priestly vestments represent the Jewish cult of purity, and reflect the order of the cosmos to summon the presence of God as creator of heaven and earth, but they are also of great political significance.

“When the Romans entered on the government [of Judea], they took possession of the vestments of the high priest, and [...] the captain of the guard lights a lamp there every day”.¹ This is the description given by the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus² of the special vestments worn by the high priests when they enter the Holy of Holies once a year, on the Day of Atonement. The high priesthood was the most important institution of Judaism with regard to religious life and governmental powers. Since the Hasmonean John Hyrcanos I (134–104 BCE), the high priest's vestments had been laid up at the tower on the north side of the temple.³ Seven days before the festival the vestments were delivered to the priests and after having purified the vestments, the high priests made use of them. The tower was rebuilt by Herod, who named the tower 'Antonia' in honour of his friend Marcus Antonius, and the garments were kept there during his reign, as well as that of his son Archelaos until Judea came under the direct control of the Roman administration (4BCE-6CE; AJ 18.93).

¹ Joseph. AJ 18:93; some scholars assume that these vestments were also used at Pessach, Schavuot and Sukkot. I have used the version of the Greek text of Josephus established by Thackeray, Marcus, Wikgren, and Feldman in the Loeb Classical Library (1927–1965), which is essentially that of Niese’s ed. minor (1888–1895).
² Josephus never himself mentions that his gentilicum was Flavius; it is found only in later Christian authors. The name change can first be found in the Codex Parisinus 1425 (see Clem. Al. Strom. 1.147.2). For further information, see Schürer (1973).
³ Joseph. AJ 15.403; 18.91–92.
The Romans housed the vestments in a stone-chamber under the seal of the priests (οἶκῳ λίθοις οἴκοδομηθέντι ὑπὸ σφραγίδι τῶν ἱερέων). Stone was considered a particularly pure building material in Judaism (mKel. 5.11; 10.41 etc.), a fact which – according to Josephus – seems to have been known to the Romans. By explaining that the captain of the guard lights a lamp in front of the vestments, Josephus indicates that the guard now takes over the daily lighting of the Menorah of the Temple which had been the duty of the priests and high priests (Exod. 27:21; 30:8; Lev. 24:3–784; 2Chron. 13:11; Gussmann, 2008); as a result, the guard pays homage to God as represented by the garment. One thing is clear: the high priestly vestments represent a cultic power in a manner that goes beyond mere symbolic meaning.

As an aristocratic chief priest himself, Josephus describes the office of the high priest and its holders from personal experience. As such, he was interested in the proceedings of the cults and the Temple, yet his work shows familiarity with Roman concerns. Neither aspect should surprise us. This multifaceted writer served as a Jewish general, a client of the Flavian emperors, and an apologist of the Jewish people. Josephus’ literary use of high priestly vestments reflects his own involvement in the Jewish cultic world and in the Roman political world.

Josephus proves to be a unique witness to a Jewish priesthood of the Jerusalem temple that has at the time of his writings already become powerless and without a specific function. The cultic and ritual purity laws, the calendar of religious holidays and the temple offerings could no longer be properly fulfilled, because the Jewish temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed as a symbol of unity and purity and as the representation of God’s presence. For Josephus it is clear that God’s presence had left the temple (BJ 6.299). However, Josephus describes the priesthood and the temple in the present tense, in other words as if the temple were still being used as a Jewish temple and the priesthood were still being exercised. Not only do the temple and (high) priestly vestments represent the Jewish cult of purity and reflect the order of the cosmos, but they are also of political significance. He makes this clear in both works by using the rhetorical technique of ekphrasis, “a description that places the subject before the

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5 His father was a priest of the ‘line’ of Jehoiarib and his mother was a descendant of the Hasmonean high priests and kings who had ruled Jerusalem until the time of Herod.
6 Grave and synagogue inscriptions from the time after 70 CE give the impression of a priesthood in diaspora that is no longer based on a priestly lineage, but on a solid understanding of the Torah; see Levine (2005, 523–525).
7 For the application of the term ekphrasis to this aspect of Josephus’ work see also Gussmann, (2008). However, it is not clear how he defines the term.
eyes”. His aim however is different in each case. In *Bellum Judaicum BJ* he emphasises the dividing walls and the different court-yards, and in doing so makes use of Greco-Roman technical terms, apparently with the aim of protecting the sanctuary from strangers. In *Antiquitates AJ* on the other hand his detailed description of the tabernacle and the temple of Solomon focuses on the architecture and the vestments, apparently with the aim of idealising the past and protecting God’s indwelling in the sanctuary. However, in referring to Solomon’s temple prayer, Josephus suggests the possibility of God’s presence in heaven instead of the temple. By analysing his terminology, we find that he presents various aspects of the exotic elements in different ways. In describing the high priests’ vestments, for example, he transliterates Aramaic terms which are mainly *hapax legomena*; in describing the holy and the profane and the inside of the temple, like the altars and the Menorah, which are not mentioned in the Septuagint (and the New Testament writings), he uses vocabulary known to us partly from the *leges sacrae*; and, in describing the building of the temple, he introduces Greek and Roman architectural terminology. A further point should also be noted: these details are found almost exclusively in *Antiquitates (AJ)* and rather seldom in the earlier *Bellum Judaicum (BJ)*. Nevertheless, the overall conception of the high priestly vestments in *AJ* and *BJ* is the same: the vestments symbolise the universe and the heavenly world in order to summon the presence of God as the creator of heaven and earth. It is the minute description of materials and colours that acts as the vehicle of the symbolic reference: The priests’ vestments and the temple signal the presence of God.

1. **Ekphrasis: ‘Placing the subject before the eyes’**

“*Ekphrasis* is a descriptive speech”, claims Theon in his mid- to late-first century CE *Progymnasmata*, “which vividly (ἐναργῶς) brings the subject shown before

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8 On ekphrasis, Elsner (1995, 125–155); Pollitt (1974); see also Stewart (1993, 130–174); and Métraux (1995), who identifies a correlation between medical success with regard to bodily function and artistic development, especially in sculpture. The ancient term ἔκφρασις (Lat. *descriptio*) covered descriptions of persons, things, situations, or places. Webb (2009); Webb (1997, 112–127), are especially helpful sources with regard to different descriptions; see also Egelhaaf (1997, 942–950).
the eyes”. By this he means the rhetorical method of description “of persons and events and places and times” whereby one creates images with words. Nicolaos of Myra (fifth century CE) is explicit about this: “Descriptiveness is considered a particular feature of ekphrasis since it is this characteristic which most clearly distinguishes ekphrastic writing from mere repeating; the latter namely contains only a mere description of the object, whereas the former tries to make the listeners / readers into spectators”. 

The question of whether the descriptions are to be traced back to ancient art-works must remain open and is, as far as the ancient authors are concerned, not important. However, it is mainly in this narrow sense of a description of an existing image or building that ekphrasis has been taken up in New Testament exegesis. In my view, however, ekphrasis needs to be seen in a more complex setting of cultural ideas about vision. The rhetorical objective of ekphrasis was not to imitate or represent the world of the viewer but rather to produce a viewing subject who is thereby induced to question his or her ordinary assumptions about the world. Ekphrastic descriptions by Cebes, Lucian, or Philostratus seem to share a common conception, formulated as follows by Pseudo-Hermogenes: “The virtues of ekphrasis are above all clarity and vividness; for the expression should almost bring about sight through the sense of hearing. One should also make the style like the subject matter: if the subject is flowery, let the style be so too; if the subject is harsh the language should be likewise”. There are differing ideas about the theory that the ear can become a seeing organ. Nevertheless, the following characteristics, which are weighted differently by various authors, can be located on a continuum.

The most central aspect is enargeia, which one can translate into English as ‘vividness’, ‘the process of appearing before someone’s eyes’, or ‘the ability to put something in perspective’. Enargeia is not a neutral rhetorical category but

9 Theon, Progymn. p. 24 Rabe; tr. Webb. In the imperial period, ekphrasis was classed among the progymnasmata; see Zimmermann (1999, 61–79 at 61–62); Elsner (2002, 1–18); see also Graf (1995, 113–155 at 144).
10 Theon, Prog., p. 24 Rabe, tr. Webb.
11 For what follows see also Weissenrieder (2014, 215–239).
12 Philostratus Imag. 2.31 (transl. LCL).
13 Nicolaos, Progymnasma 68–69 Felten; his ideas were favourably received and deepened by Pliny and others, see Graf (1995, 148–149); also Stegemann (1936, 424–457, at 438–439); Elsner (2002, 1–18).
15 An example of this narrow use is Gußmann (2008).
16 Hermog. Prog. 22 and 23 Rabe.
is often interpreted as emotive, especially by Quintilian. However, ‘readerly visual- uality’ was not seen as an optional personal response. Those who responded in ways deemed inadequate were classified as morally deficient, slow, and incapable. Ekphrasis is a quality of speech that makes something inwardly present that was formerly absent. As Quintilian writes: “From such impressions arises that enargeia [...], which makes us seem not so much to narrate as to exhibit the actual scene, while our emotions will be no less actively stirred than if we were present at the actual occurrence.” It is important to emphasise the remote conditional here: as if we were present. So, it is a matter of the illusion of making things vivid in language. Quintilian uses ekphrasis interchangeably with φαντασία, because it is not a matter of conveying facts but of seeing absent pictures with our eyes, of being “in their presence”. This context can be psychological, political, or religious. Longinus even describes his listeners as enslaved, δουλούς, and astonished, ἐκπλήσσειν, by objective representation, and arguments. This is central for the use of θαυμάζειν (“to wonder”, “to be perplexed”), which appear in most texts classified as ekphrastic. Indeed, θαυμάζειν is also an important term in BJ and AJ with regard to the beauty and significance of the temple and the vestments. At first sight it may seem to be just a matter of emphasising the beauty, prophetic effect and ritual meaning of the temple and the priestly vestments. However, the use of the word-field θαυμάζειν in the context of the verbs of seeing and understanding may allow a further interpretation: the perception of the visibility of the invisible.

18 Quint. Inst. 6.2.32; at 8.3.61–62 he offers a distinction between evidentia (enargeia) and perspicuitas.
20 “What the Greeks call phantasia, it is through these that images of absent things are represented to the mind in such a way that we seem to see them with our eyes and to be in their presence. Whoever has mastery of them will have the most powerful effect on the emotions in affectibus. Some people say that this type of man who can imagine in himself things, words, and deeds well and in accordance with truth is euphantasiotatos—most skilled in summoning up phantasia” (Quint. Inst. 6.2.29–30, transl. Webb).
21 Quintilian Institutiones 6.2.30 (transl. Webb); the Ciceronian Latin for ekphrasis is illustratio or evidentia (De officiis I, 30.107; 32.115).
22 Longinus approaches this aspect of living speech in his Peri hypsous 15.9: “When, then, is the effect of rhetorical visualisation? There is much it can do to bring urgency and passion into our words; but it is when it is closely involved with factual arguments that as well as persuading the listener, it enslaves him”, transl. Goldhill.
23 For thaumazest in connection with the temple and the vestments e.g. AJ 8.83; 129; 15.311; BJ 5.65; 179; thuma 15.95; AJ 3.216; thauamatos BJ 5.212; AJ 3.135; AJ 8.97, 130.
Enargeia is closely connected with seeing. Numerous examples of this have to do with the question of how and what one sees: they show the subject as he or she would see/picture her- or himself. So it is clear that the ekphrastic literature is integrated into the ancient discourse of seeing, which orients itself around physiological and psychological concepts such as cognition and comprehension. In the end, ekphrasis is employed to educate the reader and the listener as seeing subjects.² It is worth noting at this point that seeing (ἰδεῖν) is mentioned quite often.² This is especially important in BJ as the reader walks with Josephus the priest across the various thresholds – the curtains and the gates to the court – and sees before his or her eyes the holy of holies in the Jerusalem temple. In AJ the precise and detailed description of the tabernacle and the architecture of the temple of Solomon, the construction of the Holy of Holies as the place of indwelling of God, is made clear.

2. From the city-wall to the temple-curtain: a guided city-tour embedded in a war report in BJ

The Second temple and its destruction are widely discussed in the books of BJ (written ca. 79–81 CE). In addition to describing the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, Josephus reports extensively on the architecture of the temple. He emphasises the construction of the temple, the functions of the priests, and the priestly garments as he makes clear in the prologue, where he even uses the formula “neither adding nor omitting anything”.²⁶

Josephus provides the description of Jerusalem and the Jerusalem temple in the form of a ‘tour guide’ at BJ 5.184 – 247). The context is noteworthy because the guide is embedded in the description of the revolt and the Roman war, and is

²⁴ Elsner (1995, 33); see also Bartsch (1989, 14 – 40). It is a misconception to think that all ekphrasis aimed at reproducing the world of the audience. On the contrary, study of the so-called Tabula points in a very different direction, as Elsner demonstrates: “The goal of the art in the Tabula is not to imitate the viewers’ world at all, but rather to initiate viewers out of their ordinary assumptions into a new exegetic reality, a truth that brings salvation”.

²⁵ BJ 5.58; 124; AJ 3.81, 81, 102, 137, 146, 155; 8.84, 99, 118; 15.380.


The treatise Contra Apionem refers to the vestments of high priests only briefly and will largely be ignored in my discussion. See the excellent book by Gerber (1997).
thus a kind of regressive moment in the narrative. At various points, he provides information about the tent sanctuary for God (\textit{AJ} 3.100 – 189), the temple of Solomon (\textit{AJ} 8.61 – 110) and the second temple of Herod (\textit{AJ} 15.380 – 425 and \textit{BJ} 5.184 – 247), the religious services, the high priests, their sacrifices and prayers as well as the role of the high priests’ regalia.\textsuperscript{27} However, before describing the city and the Temple in detail, Josephus metaphorically embeds Judea, Jerusalem and the Temple in concentric circles of holiness. He begins with the location of Judea, which borders a city known as Anuathu Borcaeus on its northern side and an Arabic city called Iardan on its southern side;\textsuperscript{28} the eastern boundary is a natural one, namely the Jordan, and the western boundary is defined as Jaffa. Right in the middle (\textit{μεσαιτάτη}) of this delineated space is Jerusalem (and especially the Temple).\textsuperscript{29} Here, too, the basis is the revolt against the Romans.\textsuperscript{30} Josephus thus presents a cosmography that is based on concentric circles surrounding the Holy of Holies.\textsuperscript{31} In doing so, he draws on cosmographic concepts that are also found in the \textit{Book of Jubilees}, where Mount Zion is called the “navel of the world” (\textit{Jub.} 8:19; see also \textit{Jdg.} 9:37; \textit{Ezk}. 38:12).\textsuperscript{32} With regard to Judea, he uses the term \textit{ὁμφαλὸς}, which was amongst others associated with the famous sacred site of Delphi.\textsuperscript{33} Thus it is not surprising that Josephus assumes this association to be generally known (\textit{τινές} [...] \textit{ἐκάλεσαν}).

With his companion, a foreigner (\textit{BJ} 5.223 τοῖς [...] ἀφικνουμένωις ξένωις πόρωθεν), he slowly approaches the temple and its various courts and partitions (the partition between Jews and non-Jews\textsuperscript{34} in \textit{BJ} 5.193; between Israelites and priests; and between pure and impure Israelites in \textit{BJ} 5.226 – 227). Josephus begins with the first courtyard (\textit{ὁ πρῶτος περίβολος BJ} 5.190 – 192), the outer, or

\textsuperscript{27} See Schimanowski (2011, 319 – 320).
\textsuperscript{28} Avi-Yonah (1966, 155 – 156).
\textsuperscript{29} See Joseph. \textit{BJ} 3.52: τινές οὐκ ἀσκόπως ὦμφαλόν τὸ ἄστυ τῆς χώρας ἐκάλεσαν.
\textsuperscript{31} Numerous studies subscribe to Josephus’ view of the archaeology of Herod’s temple, which cannot be discussed in more detail here; still of importance are the extensive explanations by Busink (1970, 21062 – 1251); Roller (1998); Lichtenberger (1999); Jaap (2000); Richardson (2004, 253 – 307).
\textsuperscript{32} In addition, it can be shown that rabbinical literature in particular focuses at length on this concentric concept, as seen, for instance, in the Mishnah treatise of Kelim, which includes ten different levels of holiness for Jerusalem, starting with the country of Israel, Israel’s city walls, the city of Jerusalem, the temple mount and the various courtyards.
\textsuperscript{33} See e.g. Price (1999, 56).
\textsuperscript{34} See also \textit{AJ} 15.11.5; \textit{BJ} 5.2; 6.2.4; \textit{BJ} 5.226 f.; Clermont-Ganneau (1881, 132 – 33); Fry (1975, 20); see also \textit{OGIS} II 598, 294 – 295; \textit{CIG} II 1400, 328 – 330. Sklar (2005, 15 – 20); Nihan (2007, 59 – 68).
gentiles’, courtyard. This was open to non-Jews as well as Jews and Josephus succumbs to its beauty, describing the extraordinary beauty of the columns and the royal Stoa at the southern end of the temple complex. The terms that Josephus uses can also be found in Pausanias’ *Periegesis*, as Ehrenkrook has convincingly shown, so one might assume that Josephus wanted to compare it to the beauty of polytheistic temples. However, this is not at all the case, as the following excerpt demonstrates: “The costliness of the material, its beautiful craftsmanship and harmonious combination created an unforgettable sight, and yet neither the painter’s brush nor the sculptor’s chisel had decorated the work from the outside”. Although Josephus praises the royal Stoa in glowing terms, it is clear that he is emphasising the absence of painting (ζωγραφία) and sculpture (γλυφίς), contrasting it with the natural beauty of the material (φυσικὴ πολυτέλεια) and the simple panels (κεδρίνος δὲ φατνώμασιν ὁρόφωντο: BJ 5.190–191). The fact that this description of the simple decorations is truly unusual can be seen from a comparison with AJ 15.416, where various materials are emphasised (αἱ δ’ ὀροφαί ξύλοις ἐξήσκεντο γλυφαῖς πολυτρόποις σχημάτων ἰδέαις), like Greek and Roman architectural elements (Corinthian columns: AJ 15.414). In his tourist guide, Josephus thus first insists that the Jerusalem temple is just as beautiful as the Greek temples and then goes on to emphasise that this is due particularly to its aniconic construction style.

The second courtyard, τὸ δεύτερον ἱερόν, is separated from the first by a warning notice and a dividing wall using the term τρυφάκτος. This dividing wall receives astonishingly little discussion in ancient literature. It is primarily Josephus who refers to the dividing wall in his description of the sanctuary. However, Josephus is not the only one to mention this wall: one sign, a well-preserved block made of limestone, was found on the north side of the Jerusalem temple courtyard. A fragment of another sign, a spoil, was discovered in a graveyard near St. Stephen’s Gate, also known as the Lion’s Gate. While the second sign is not as well preserved, the texts are broadly the same, excepting

[35] Ben-Dov (1985, 132) argued that this outer courtyard is not part of the temple. Against this idea: Ehrenkrook (2011, 132).
[38] Ehrenkrook (2011, 132).
[39] He was using the term τρυφάκτος as well as the older form δρυφάκτος; see the following paragraph on these terms.
[40] Clermont-Ganneau (1881, 132–133), cf. Fry (1975, 20); note also OGIS II 598, 294–295; CIG II 1400 ll. 328–330.
[41] Iliffe (1936, 1–3). A ‘spoil’ is a displaced find without a significant context.
a few minor differences.\textsuperscript{42} The text reads: “No alien (μηθένα ἄλλογενή) may enter [the area] within the balustrade (ἔντος τοῦ ...) τρυφάκτου and the enclosure (καὶ περιβόλου) around the temple. Whoever is caught, on himself shall be put blame for the death which will ensue (ἐσκοτήσεως έσται δίὰ τὸ ἔξακολοιθεν θάνατον)”.\textsuperscript{43} By using the term τρυφάκτος as well, Josephus is protecting the purity of the sanctuary. He also uses several terms for non-Jews who are not permitted to enter the sanctuary: ἄλλοσιθήνη (AJ 15.417), μηθείς (BJ 6.125), alienigenae (Ap. 2.108), and ἄλλοφυλος (BJ 5.194).\textsuperscript{44} It is also noteworthy that Josephus lexically distinguishes the stranger ξενός from the alien ἄλλογενής who is not permitted to enter the temple.

The term δρυφάκτος/τρυφάκτος, ‘partition’, is first found in Aristophanes,\textsuperscript{45} and later in inscriptions, most of which associate it with one of two contexts, courtrooms and temples.\textsuperscript{46} The term, often in the plural, is used to describe a barrier or dividing wall in public buildings, especially those that (also) served as council-chambers.\textsuperscript{47} The word is used for a barrier made of wood in a longish inscription from Delos.\textsuperscript{48} Herodian of Alexandria uses the term δρυφάκτος in his abridged Reliquiae with the same sense.\textsuperscript{49} The priest Josephus, but not the stranger, can pass this barrier and so gain access to the inner courtyard, the ἐνδόν αὐλή, which only ritually pure Jewish men may enter (BJ 5.227; not mentioned in AJ) and to the women’s courtyard, γυναίκωντις (BJ 5.199; 204; not mentioned in AJ) likewise called an ‘inner courtyard’, ἐντὸς περιβόλου (AJ 15.418; not mentioned in BJ), which ritually pure Jewish women from Judea and the diaspora may enter.

\textsuperscript{42} The Latin version mentioned in Joseph. BJ 5.194 has not been found to date.
\textsuperscript{43} Cf. the further discussion in Adna (1999, 31). He and others have argued convincingly that these signs would have been put up at the end of the first construction phase, in other words 12/11 or 10/9 BCE. This seems plausible if the signs are indeed an addition by Herod.
\textsuperscript{44} Gussmann (2008, 351) points out that Josephus did not use ἄλλογενής because -γένος contained a “genealogical connotation”.
\textsuperscript{45} IG I.64.14 ἄνευ δρυφάκτου τὴν δίκην μέλλεις καλεῖν, ὁ πρῶτος ἡμῖν τῶν ἱερῶν ἐφαίνετο, cf. Pl. Euthyd. 277e2f.
\textsuperscript{46} See Thdt. Qu.in Ex.60, who is familiar with the term for the tabernacle: δρυφάκτῳ [...] ἡ σκηνὴ προσεῖκε.
\textsuperscript{47} This particularly applies to the references in Aristophanes and the Alexandrian grammarian Aelius Herodianus.
\textsuperscript{48} ἐκ της περιπετειας ξυλικής οὐλής τὸν δρυφακτὸν καὶ αὐτὸν κατηρμημένον καὶ τὸν τε ναόν τὸς Τύχης καὶ τὸ ἁρχαῖον Κασίαριειν [κατασκευασας] [παραδώσειν [...] IG XII.3.326.25.
\textsuperscript{49} See Herodianus ed. Lehrs (1848) II 494.16, though this work contains much suppositious material.
The stranger seems not to be a conqueror but, rather, an admirer of the temple. The narrative perspective changes from outside the temple where the stranger could join the priest (“we have already observed”; “this part was open to our view”: BJ 5.208–209; “before you come to the tower”), to the steps where Josephus entered into the sanctuary (“they went up”; “that nation”/“our nation”; “those priests”). He describes the subdivision of the temple area into temple courts, forecourts and the temple building proper, capturing the space’s contours in exact detail (see 3.1 and 3.2). Finally, the high priest is mentioned, because he alone can enter the Holy of Holies. Access to the Holy of Holies initiates viewers into a new reality: They see that in some respects, God, the Temple, and the high priest form, in an accord between heaven and earth, the guide of the Jewish people.

3. (In-)sights in the past as prototype for the present in AJ

The history of the priestly vestments is described in AJ, written around 94 CE, as a synthesis of the history of the temple and the high priests: the main parts, 1–10 and 11–20, refer to the construction and destruction of the Temples: the temple of Solomon in 586 BCE and the second temple in 70 CE. In each case, the history of the temple is followed by a prosopography of high priests ( AJ 10.151–153; 20.224–251). In this context it is worth noting that Josephus writes in his introduction that he will present τὴν παρ’ ἡμῖν ἀρχαιολογίαν καὶ διάταξιν τοῦ πολιτεύματος ἐκ τῶν Ἐβραϊκῶν (AJ 1.5). We can read the frequent

51 See for the tent AJ 3.100 ff.
52 In his building report Josephus gives the dimensions of the temple as 60 cubits (c.30 m.) by 20 cubits (10 m.), with a height of 30 cubits (c.15 m.); AJ 8.64 mentions 60 cubits; the figures differ in LXX as well.
53 BJ 5.219 έκειτο δὲ οὐδὲν ὅλως ἐν αὐτῷ, ἄβατον δὲ καὶ ἀχραντὸν καὶ ἄθεατον ἦν πάσιν, ἀγίου δὲ ἀγίον ἐκαλεῖτο.
55 Numerous scholars have tried to interpret the introduction to AJ in light of the historiography of a historian like Dionysius of Halicarnassus, e.g. Sterling (1992, 285f.); see critically Rajak (2001, 253).
reference to the Jewish πολιτεία as echoing the laws of the true lawmaker (νομοθέτης), whom Josephus believes to be Moses and who stands in contrast to the lawmaker who refers to mythologies (AJ 1.15: καθαρόν τὸν [...] λόγον τῆς παρ’ ἀλ-λοις ἀσχήμονος μυθολογίας).

Josephus mentions three terms for the priest’s regalia: στολή, ἐσθής, and ἔνδυμα.⁵⁶ In general, στολή means military equipment, habit and especially traditional regalia. In a more narrow sense, the word has the connotation ‘upper garment’ or ‘robe’, a long flowing white garment in which a priest or hierophant enters a temple, be it a mystery cult or the sanctuary of Artemis. Josephus uses the term for the majority of the priestly or high priestly vestments (42 times); if he wants to refer to a specific part of the garment, he uses the term with the adjective ‘priestly’ vestment (ἡ ἱερατικὴ στολή)⁵⁷ or the genitive construction ‘the vestment of (the) priests’ (ἱερέων στολή)⁵⁸ and similarly for the high-priestly vestment (AJ 4.83: τὴν ἁρχιερατικὴν στολήν; 18.90, 93: τὴν στολήν τοῦ ἁρχιερέως; 3.211: γάρ Ἀραών καὶ τὴν στολὴν τὴν ἱεράν; AJ 19.314: ἔνδυς στολισμὸν ἱερόν).⁵⁹ He rarely uses the term for the splendid gowns or royal robes.⁶⁰ In BJ Josephus does not use this term. Instead, we find here the ἐσθής or ἔνδυμα, neither of which has a specific connotation, though in the Septuagint ἐσθής is often used to refer to beautiful clothing.⁶¹ Aside from priestly garments, these terms can also refer to workaday clothes. Only in AJ does Josephus differentiate between holy and profane garments.

Rank in the hierarchy of the Jewish temple staff was indicated by the regalia. Josephus calls an active priest “the one wearing the priestly vestment”. A high priest wore the normal priestly vestment and other representative garments mentioned above. However, clothing also symbolizes Jewish customs in another way, as an example shows: When one of the religious orders in Jerusalem, the Levites, lobbied to be allowed to wear a new article of dress, namely the white priestly stola instead of their unbleached byssos, they were upsetting, at any rate in Josephus’ view, the traditional rules so important for proper order in Jewish soci-

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⁵⁶ For the following, see Wilckens (1964, 687–690); Edwards (2001, 153–159) and Gussmann (2008).
⁵⁷ AJ 3.107; 279; 6.359; 8.93; 9.223; 15.390, 403, 405.
⁵⁸ AJ 3.158, 180; 11.327.
⁵⁹ Wilckens (1964, 687–690).
⁶⁰ He can use the term in the singular and plural, even if it was only one garment: AJ 3.151, 158, 205, 206, 208, 279; 8.94; 11.80, 331, 335; 12.117; 15.407408; 18.91, 92, 95; 20.216.
ety.62 “All this was contrary to the ancestral laws”, Josephus says, “and such transgression was bound to make us liable to punishment”.63

3.1. The vestments of priests and high priests

A careful analysis of the terminology that Josephus uses to describe vestments reveals various forms and mechanisms for specifically emphasising ‘unusual’ or even ‘exotic’ elements in the text. Josephus does not shy away from introducing new loan words in his description of the priestly and highly priestly vestments. In his description of these garments in AJ 3.151–187, Josephus uses Aramaic and Hebrew terms that were obscure and unfamiliar, at least in Rome, and he even changes the term from Greek to transcriptions of Aramaic terms, e.g. for priests from the Greek ιερεύς to חנינא (Hebr.) and for high priests from Greek ἀρχιερεύς to ἀραβάχην (Hebr.).64 The priests spoke Aramaic, and since the second century BCE Aramaic was most likely their written language; however, it was not known to the Romans, who most scholars think would have been Josephus’ target audience. But it would be quite mistaken to think that Josephus chose to transliterate from Aramaic into Greek in order to intensify the exotic flavour of the text – Hebrew would have been quite exotic enough for a Roman reader. Rather what Josephus seeks to do is to set up Aramaic as a priestly language, implying that its use dates back to the time of the tent of the tabernacle. In other words, he is deliberately shifting Aramaic out of the everyday world and representing it to outsiders as a priestly language in use ever since the days of the tent of the by representing it as a priestly language, establishing the era of the tent of the tabernacle as an ideal time.

(1) After the rites of purification, priests and high priests put on their μανάχασην, from the Hebrew דביסנכמ (Exod. 28:42),65 a kind of underwear συνακτήρ (literally: ‘that which draws together’)66 which occurs in Greek only here, even though Josephus is well aware of other Greek terms used in the LXX.67 Over these drawers priests and high priests wear a “linen garment of double texture”

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63 AJ 20.218.
64 For the following Aramaic terms see already Rengstorf (1979); Hayward (2002); Swartz (2012, 33–54).
67 See e.g. Exod. 36:3, 5LXX; Exod. 28:42LXX.
(AJ 3.153), which is called χεθομένη, a transliteration from the Aramaic אנותכ (Exod. 28:40).\(^68\) According to Feldman, this term may be related to the Greek word χιτών, a tunic, but in this case reaching to the ankles. This tunic is worn by both priests and high priests alike.\(^69\) The next item is the girdle as βαΐθ from the Hebrew טנבא (Exod. 28:4, 39). Josephus mentions that this girdle is embroidered with scarlet, purple, blue-purple (also known as hyacinth) and fine linen and the fabric seems “like the skin of a serpent” and has “flowers [...] woven into it” (AJ 3.155).\(^70\) Josephus uses the term μασσάβινη from the Aramaic term מָשָׁבִין (literally ‘checker work’ [Rengstorf], i.e. multi-coloured fabric; Exod. 28:4, 39 speaks of המָשָׁבִין, ‘checkered tunic’ instead).\(^71\) Again, this term does not appear elsewhere in ancient literature (AJ 3.156).

(2) The high priests put a second tunic “made of hyacinth”\(^72\) and interwoven with gold which is called μεείρ from the Hebrew מֺעֵל, robe (Exod. 28:31), which is

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\(^{68}\) In his description of the garments Josephus is following a long tradition; see Hayward (2002) which is one of the foundational books for Josephus’s use of vestments; see also Gussmann (2008, 384 f.) without any reference to Hayward.

\(^{69}\) Josephus reflects notions found in another, slightly older, Jewish source. In Wisdom of Solomon 18:20–25 we find a relecture of Qorah’s rebellion and of the plague which followed (Num. 16:1–50), the latter relieved by Aaron’s timely appearance “between the living and the dead” (Num. 16:48) to offer an incense sacrifice. Aaron is dressed in his priestly garments when he performs this act of atonement: “For upon his robe which reached down his feet the whole universe was depicted, and the glories of the fathers were upon the engraving on the four rows of stones, and your majesty was represented on the diadem on his head. From these the destroyer withdrew; these he feared, for merely the experience of anger was enough” (Wis. 18:24–25). The description here moves from the body-covering through the ephod to the head. The vestments are conceived as liturgical weapons, like the “prayer and propitiation by incense” (18:21). Aristeas likewise describes the vestments of the high priest Eleazer from foot to head: “We were greatly astonished, when we saw Eleazar in the worship, both as regards the mode of his dress, and the majesty of his appearance, which he wore, a tunic and the precious stones upon it. There were golden bells upon his ankle length robe, giving forth a peculiar kind of music sound, and on both sides of these there were pomegranates with variegated flowers of a marvelous color. He was girded with a girdle of excellence beauty, woven in the most beautiful colors. On his breast he wore the oracle of God, as it is called, in which are set twelve stones, of different kinds, inlaid in gold, containing the names of the leaders of the tribes, according to their original order, each one flashing forth in an indescribable way its own particular color. On his head he wore a so-called tiara, and upon this in the middle of his forehead an inimitable mitre, the royal crown full of glory with the name of God inscribed in sacred letters on a plate of gold [...]”. (Aristeas 96–98; transl. Hayward). See further Hayward (2002).

\(^{70}\) The Babylonian Jews call it ἐμία, referring to the fact that the same equivalence in Aramaic is found in Jerome Ep. 64 (CSEL 54.598, 16–18).

\(^{71}\) See Feldman (2004, 273); see also Rengstorf (1979, Vol.3, 57), who defines it as “priestly vestment (interwoven with gold, embroidered with gold)”.

\(^{72}\) Joseph. AJ 159, tr. Feldman.
a hapax legomenon in ancient literature (AJ 3.159; cf. Rengstorff). At the bottom is a fringe containing small precious-metal bells and balls recalling pomegranates: “Golden bells and pomegranates hang side by side from the fringes, the bells of thunder, the pomegranates of lightning”.73 Here Josephus may be associating thunder and lightning with God’s presence, God’s voice redeeming Israel at the Exodus and in this sense a divine revelation as described in Isa. 30:30; Ps. 18:13.14; Job 37:4. With these adornments, the high priests’ second tunic assured worshippers of God’s presence with Israel in the past, present and future. In AJ 3.184 Josephus also speaks of gold that is woven into the vestment of the high priests. The term αὐγή can denote the ‘light of the sun’s rays’, and the verb αὐγέω means to shine or glitter. Josephus allegorises the gold too, as a token “of the sunlight, which is available to all” (AJ 3.184). In the same sense, the golden crown on the head of the high priest glints in the light “in which God most delights” (AJ 3.187). Josephus attaches great importance to the glitter of the priestly ornaments:74

The radiance or ‘sheen’ is a reprise of the shining cloud that in former times appeared to aid Israel in times of need (Exod. 34:5; 40:34; Num. 10:34 f.). Further, he emphasises in the context of Solomon’s temple that “heaven, although concealed, is not closed” (BJ 5.208). This introduces a further point, the cosmological significance of this entire complex, architecture, furnishings and priestly vestments. Josephus leaves no doubt about the cosmic significance of the garments, the curtains, the high priests, vestments and the cultic architecture.75

(3) This is especially true if one considers a third item, called in Hebrew יֵפֶן, ephod (Exod. 28:6), in the Septuagint and Greek literature ἐπωμίς, and in Josephus ἐφώδης (AJ 3.162, 163, 164, 170). In Greek literature, the term refers to a part of a woman’s tunic fastened at the shoulder with a brooch.76 In relation to the high priest’s vestment, it seems to have been a sort of short embroidered cape covering the shoulders, with a gap at mid-breast. This gap was filled by an item Josephus calls ἐσσήν (AJ 3.163, 166, 170, 171, 185, 216, 217, 218), in Hebrew וְשִׁן (‘oracle’; Exod. 28:15), LXX λογεῖον, which may connote a ‘speaking-place’ or an ‘oracle’ (AJ 3.163).77 The oracle is reflected in the two shining sardonyxes, one at each shoulder, upon which the names of the sons of Jacob were engraved (AJ 3.166). According to Feldman, the rabbinic tradition (Yoma 73b) thought they carried the names Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and possibly also the term

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73 Joseph. BJ 5.231, tr. Feldman.
75 For further details, see Hayward (2002).
77 Feldman (2004, 275 n. 428) refers here to the function of Urim and Thummim.
for tribes, שבטים.  

Josephus emphasises the Hebrew characters, which he, in connection with the engraving in the crown, can call “holy characters” (AJ 3.178). These sardonyxes have oracular properties showing the divine presence and the will of God in worship. Putting these points together we should, therefore, conclude that this is a cultic oracle.

God is also reflected in the twelve precious stones on the breastplate of the ephod. If these precious stones gleam, they predict a victory. To that extent, the breastplate and the sardonyx stones can be called a ‘war oracle’. Josephus elsewhere recounts that the high priest John Hyrcanus I (134–104 BCE) – while offering incense alone in the Temple – heard a (divine) voice declaring “that his sons had just defeated Antiochus”. And, at AJ 13.282, he reports that Hyrcanus experienced a vision while asleep (φανέντα κατὰ τοὺς ὑπνοὺς αὐτῶ τὸν θεόν). God revealed (δεῖξαντος) to him that his son Alexander Jannai would succeed him (AJ 13.322). These war oracles ended with the death of John Hyrcanus I, to whom, as the last Hasmonean, Josephus ascribed divinatory skill “because God was displeased with the transgression of the law” (AJ 3.217; transl. Feldman). The power of the nation is understood in the context of the nation’s apostasy of the law and this is symbolised in the vestment of the high priest, specifically in the precious stones.

The high priest also wears a hyacinth-coloured cap “without a cone-shaped top” which is called μασναεφθῆς Hebrew תפנצמ (Exod. 28:4, 39). In Exod. 28 the term refers to the head covering, the mitre, of a high priest. Josephus goes on to describe another form of much more formal head-gear, the mitre of the high priest, which is a three-tiered golden crown with swathes of blue embroidery:

Furthermore, the head-dress appears to me to symbolize heaven, being blue; else it would have not have borne upon it the name of God, blazoned upon the crown – a crown, moreover, of gold by reason of that sheen in which the Deity most delights.

At BJ 5.235, Josephus mentions that there was another golden crown “whereon were embossed the sacred letters [of God]: to wit, four vowels” (φωνήντα τέσσαρα). Exod. 28:36; 36:37LXX speaks of “holy for God”. Holy does not refer to

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80 Josephus also reverses the order of Exod. 28:2–39: whereas the Bible text begins with the garments of Aaron, and ends with a brief description of the ordinary priest, Josephus describes the vestments of the priests in detail. This may be reflected in Josephus’ self-understanding as ordinary priest; see Robertson (1991, 181).
82 Transl. Thackeray.
the name of God but to the characters: *BJ* 5.235 τὰ ἱερὰ γράμματα and *AJ* 3.178 ἱεροῖς γράμμασι τοῦ θεοῦ.\(^{83}\) Josephus does not count this cap and the golden crown as a third vestment because it belongs to God (Gussmann, 2008). The sacred characters of God’s name are represented through the high priestly vestments and golden crown to the Jewish people.

I have mentioned above that Josephus emphasises the exotic element in *AJ*: he takes these terms neither from the Hebrew Bible nor from its translation into Greek, but transliterates them from Aramaic, the language of the priests and high priests in the temple in Jerusalem. The climax is reached in his description of the high priest’s complicated headgear. Josephus reports several critical situations in which the vestments of the priests and the high priests convey the purity and holiness of the Jewish temple and communicate the will of God: when Alexander the Great (332 BCE) was standing before Jerusalem, the high priest Jaddus ordered the gates of the city to be opened and sent the people and the priests, wearing white garments and white robes respectively, toward Alexander in submission (*AJ* 11.317–347). In his full finery, the high priest Jaddus encounters Alexander outside the Holy of Holies, in fact completely outside the realm of the temple. Alexander kneels before the high priest and pays his respects to God, whose name is engraved on the golden plate of the turban’s headband (*AJ* 11.331–333).\(^{84}\) Josephus thus leaves no doubt about the significance of the high priestly vestments, which are not only of special beauty but also of prophetic significance.\(^{85}\) The vestments have their own language which lies beyond the spoken language and heightens its symbolic character. One could almost say: the clothes want to be seen.

Naturally, this conclusion feeds the expectation that the innermost aspects of the cult will also be found in transliterations of Aramaic and Hebrew terms. However, this expectation is not fulfilled.

### 3.2. The purity of the priests

The semantic field of holy-profane, pure-impure is central for Josephus in general, but especially in his discussion of the priests and high priests (ἀγνεύω, ἀγνίζω, ἀγνεία [ritually pure; see *BJ* 1.26, 229; 5.194]; ἱερός-ἱερὸν [something that belongs to the divine sphere: *AJ* 3.258]; καθαρεύω, καθαρίζω, καθάριος [ritually

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84 See Hayward (2002); Thoma (1989, 202); Gussmann (2008).
85 Especially clear with regard to Hyrcanos I; see *Ant.* 13.300; 13.282–283; 13.322).
clean]; βέβηλος [profane]; μαφός [unclean]). The frequency of the occurrence of the word-field ἱερός -ἱερόν, which occurs some 600 times, is especially striking. Though the term is avoided by the Septuagint, it is favoured by Josephus to express the idea that something belongs to the divine sphere.⁸⁶ Schrenk has pointed out that the term is used by Josephus only in the context of non-Jewish and Jewish priests (and high priests) but never for the nation of Israel as a whole. On the other hand, he notes that, in addition to synagogues (BJ 7.44) and the Jerusalem temple (BJ 4.163; 281; 6.104; AJ 8.107), the word is used of the temple of Apollo at Gaza (BJ 2.81; 14.36; 19.4), a ἱερόν. Josephus uses also the word-field καθαρεύω, καθάριζω, and καθάριος, in Jewish and non-Jewish religious contexts, for the purity of a thing. The word-field of ἁγνεύω, ἁγνίζω, ἁγνεία and ἁγνός is unusual because it is largely absent in the Septuagint (钐ձ ‘holy’ otherwise in the translation ἅγιος). A trend can be identified here which has also been found in Greek leges sacrae. Chaniotis, Bremmer and others have argued that, at least in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, if not occasionally earlier, we find a tendency to extend the notion of impurity to the mind, such that “Reinheit des Körpers meint, rein zu denken”.⁸⁷ With regard to external purity, Josephus understands the word field ἁγνεύω, ἁγνίζω, ἁγνεία and ἁγνός in terms of ritual cleanliness beyond what one could verbalise and see.⁸⁸ He takes for granted that the purity of priests must far exceed that of all other Israelites: Τῶν δ’ ιερέων καὶ διπλασίονα τὴν ἁγνείαν ἐποίησε (AJ 3.276).

Besides cleansing with cold water,⁸⁹ which is connected with priestly prayers (AJ 18.19), a priest is expected to perform a cleansing offering (AJ 1.341f.; 3.261–273; with blood: 2.312). Josephus goes beyond Leviticus (Lev. 21:14; Ezk. 44:21 [abstinence only when entering the temple]), in demanding that priests should stay away from taverns and prostitutes and requiring abstinence from wine as well (AJ 3.276).⁹⁰ A central aspect of priestly holiness is that a priest or high priest should be without any physical defect, as the repetition of the root ἀφελείς [...] ἀφέλειαν in AJ 3.278 indicates. And it seems natural for Josephus that the wife of a priest and his family should be of ‘pure origin’ (AJ 11.153; 11.307 the wife of a priest cannot be a proselyte). However, ritual purification involves not just the

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⁸⁶ Schrenk (1938, 221–284).
⁸⁸ AJ 8.97: θαυμαστὸν δὲ καὶ λόγου παντὸς ἀπέφηνε μείζων, ὡς δὲ εἴπεν καὶ τῆς ὁδεγῆς.
⁸⁹ AJ 3.152: ὅταν δὲ προσῆ ἡς ἱερουργίας ὁ ἱερεύς ἡγεμονικὸς ἢν ὁ νόμος ἁγνείαν προσαγορεύει, πρῶτον μὲν περιτέθη τὸν μαναχάσιν λεγόμενον; 3.205.
⁹⁰ Gussman (2008, 370 ff.).
body but also the mind, an ideal that finds particular expression in prayers (especially for the Essenes: *AJ* 18.19; *BJ* 2.128 – 131, 138). On this point Josephus goes beyond the Septuagint requirements. The purity laws focus on the cleansing of the body, whereas Josephus formulates additional rules with regard to the pollution of the soul. The immortal soul lives in the body as in a prison and can hope for freedom only at the death of the physical body (*Ap.* 2.203).

In my view, the choice of the word-fields ἁγνεύω, ἁγνίζω, ἁγνεία and ἱερός-ἱερόν, which were particularly important in the *leges sacrae* of polytheistic temples but rarely used in the Septuagint, should be interpreted as a deliberate appropriation of theological concepts of holiness from the Greek context. By offering a certain amount of additional exegesis, Josephus tries to make clear that this is an attempt to add moral integrity (of heart, of soul) to the traditional purity requirements.

### 3.3. The Temple

In several places, Josephus analyzes the ‘tent set up for God’ (*AJ* 3.100 – 189), the temple of Solomon (*AJ* 8.61–110), the second temple (of Herod) (*AJ* 15.380 – 425 and *BJ* 5.184 – 247) and the worship that took place there, centering around the role of the high priest. Josephus treats all of these as essential preconditions for individual acts of sacrifice and prayer. Most telling in this regard is the fact that the foundational narratives describing the high priests’ vestments occur in the account of the tent in the desert (*AJ* 3.100 – 189) and in the city tour with the stranger before the destruction of the Temple (*BJ* 5.184 – 247). The important question for Josephus is how the Israelites live and what they have to do so that YHWH can “dwell in their midst” (*Exod.* 25:8; 29:45 – 46). Together with cultic and moral laws, the sanctuary is most crucial in this regard, as it is built to be YHWH’s dwelling place. For Josephus the ideal dwelling place is, no doubt, the temple in Jerusalem. However, the notion of a portable sanctuary, which comes up again and again, also reflects the belief that the geographical position of the sanctuary is not of supreme importance. If the divine is to dwell in a sanctuary built by human hands, this sanctuary must be holy. Of particular importance to Josephus (*AJ* 8) is Solomon’s prayer in *3Kings* 8[1XX]: Just like

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91 See for a possible Platonic background Schrenk (1938).
92 The differences between *AJ* and *BJ* with regard to the measurements are significant, but this is not my focus here.
Solomon, he initially links God’s presence to the temple (2Kings 8:14–21<sup>LXX</sup>) and in the further course of the text locates this presence in heaven (2Kings 8:22, 30, 38–39, 44–45<sup>LXX</sup>); as in 3Kings 8<sup>LXX</sup>, he refers to the fact that prayers are heard in heaven. With this, Josephus documents an idea about the place where God resides, relocating it from the Temple to heaven.<sup>94</sup> Thus Josephus addresses the possibility of encountering God in heaven after the destruction of the temple.

In contrast to the case in BJ, spatial boundaries in AJ are not important in an absolute sense, as he avoids mentioning several dividing walls in the Temple courtyard. Fundamental here is the notion that, in the form of his kāḇôḏ, God ‘inhabits’ the sanctuary (<sup>חַג</sup> Exod. 25:8; AJ 8.102). Josephus accepts that different areas of the sanctuary have different degrees of holiness and makes a point of describing the passages between them. Detailed reference is also made to the materials and the colours, which reflect these degrees of holiness.

The description of the Temple starts with the vestibule, which protects the entrance-doors (2Kings 6:3), and is really just an extension of the long walls of the cella.<sup>95</sup> Josephus uses the standard Greek term πρόναος or πρόδομος for it.<sup>96</sup> After describing the outward appearance of the Temple buildings and the courtyards, Josephus explains how the main cella is divided into two parts, the so called רֵבִי (debîr), the Holy of Holies or the ‘inner house’ (2Kings 6:27; 7:50).<sup>97</sup> In his accounts, especially in AJ 8, Josephus does not explicitly mention a prohibition against entry. Nevertheless, there is clear evidence for a separation between the Holy of Holies, the main cella, the ‘outside’ porch and courtyard. At AJ 8.71–72 he uses a term for this separation otherwise rarely found in ancient literature, μέσος τοῖχος, lit. ‘middle wall’. Along with heterogeneous materials and decorations,<sup>98</sup> it marks the Temple cella as the core of the cult area. The middle wall signals explicitly an actual borderline. Besides, the door is at the same time a means of access to the room and therefore a gradual borderline as well as an actual one. This may be the reason why there is a further boundary-marker in addition to the doors, which is described as follows: “In front of the doors hung brightly coloured curtains made, not only of hyacinth, purple and scarlet, but also of the most luminous and softest linen”. Josephus refers to the καταπέτασμα-

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<sup>94</sup> On the subject, see Schmid (2006, 117).
<sup>96</sup> Hebrew וּםָל (ûlam), Greek τὸ αὐλαμ κατὰ πρόσωπον τοῦ ναοῦ. The Greek term in the Septuagint τὸ αὐλαμ is indeed unusual. See e.g. Vitruv. Arch. 4.4.1; IG IV 1484; 1487; XII, 2. 11; IX 3073; CIG 2754; IMylasa 502; CID II 621A. AJ 8.65; see also e.g. IG IV 203
<sup>97</sup> This is referred to in the Septuagint as δαβίρ.
<sup>98</sup> See further: Weissenrieder (2016, 217).
σμα, the curtain ten times (BJ 5.212; 219; 232; 6.390; 7.161; AJ 8.75; 8.90; 12.250; 14.107). He follows Exod 27:16 in distinguishing between an outer curtain, which divides the adyton from the porch (BJ 2.212–214), and an inner one, which divides the adyton from the Holy of Holies (BJ 5.219; AJ 8.90; cf. Exod. 26:31–37; 37:3; Lev. 16:2\LXX). This embroidered curtain is interpreted by Josephus as representing the four elements.

The passage carries on to claim that features of the curtain, except for the zodiacal signs, figured the ‘mysteries’. This comparison between fabrics and the elements of nature is based on two allegorising strategies: in three cases the symbolic associations of the individual colours (‘hyacinth’ = air, purple (dye) = sea, scarlet = fire) and in two, appeal to their derivation (flax grows on the earth; the murex that provides purple dye is a shell-fish).

As mentioned above, behind this curtain and the middle wall is the Holy of Holies. The Hebrew term is נַכָּשִמ, mishkan (Exod. 25:9; 26:1ff.; 40:34–35), the model of a tent or tabernacle, which is translated in the Septuagint as σκηνή. This portable temple, the Tent, is connected with the story that Israel received its ritual laws on Mount Sinai on the way to the Promised Land. In principle the portable temple symbolises that it is Israel that is considered by God as an ideal dwelling place.

According to Josephus, the cult in the temple and the high priest reach mysteriously into the realm of God: “In no other city shall there be either an altar or a temple, for God is one and the stock of the Hebrews one”. The triad of God, temple, and high priest is related to Josephus’ thinking in analogies and correlations. The term Josephus uses for thinking in analogies is most often ἀποσημαίνω, which means to ‘signify’ or ‘is an allegory of’ (esp. AJ 3.181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 292, 293). This recognition is preceded by a vision. Josephus uses the word frequently for divine manifestations; these manifestations relate to the unseen world and to wonder (θαυμα). God’s very essence can be indicated only by negative attributes: Moses “represented him as single and uncreated and immutable through all eternity, more beautiful than any mortal form, known to us by his power, but as to what he is like in essence, unknown”. Josephus alludes...
here to three aspects of the divine referring to the criteria of temporality, beauty, and knowledge. The first aspect (καὶ ἀγένητον καὶ πρός τὸν ἁίδιον χρόνον ἀναλοιωτόν) refers to the Jewish understanding that God is not created and is eternal in relation to created matter and time.¹⁰⁵ The Greek term ἀναλοιωτός is used here and in Philo Somn. 1.188, with reference to the unseen world.¹⁰⁶ The second aspect (πάσης ἰδέας θνητῆς) refers to the Jewish aniconic tradition, which is again reflected in the Holy of Holies. The third aspect is God’s (unknowable) essence (ὁγεμόνα τῶν ὀλων) and the high priest is the “head of the whole body of priests”.¹⁰⁷ Tacitus notes, that Judeans mente sola unumque numen intelligunt; those who represent God’s human form are said to be impious. Their God, he says, is sumnum [...] et aeternum neque imitabile neque interiturum (Hist. 5.5.4). Therefore, foundation and ground point beyond themselves to the cosmos (πρὸς ὅγκον κόσμου τε χάριν καὶ μεγαλουργίας ἔπενοεῖτο). Josephus’ claims here are based on the notion that the high priest’s vestments are a micro-cosm of the cosmos as a whole.¹⁰⁸ I have already referred to his claim that the high priests, wearing the sacred vestments (τὴν ἱερὰν ἐσθήτα περικείμενοι), lead “ceremonies of cosmic significance” (καὶ τῆς κοσμικῆς θρησκείας).¹⁰⁹ The assassination in the city-centre of the high priest Ananos, the son of Ananos/Hannas (Hp 24), in the year 66/67 CE was, thus, in Josephus’ view, the beginning of a cosmic collapse: the fall of Jerusalem begins with the death of the high priest:

So they who but lately had worn the sacred vestments, led those ceremonies of cosmic significance and been reverenced by visitors to the city from every quarter of the earth, were now seen cast out naked, to be devoured by dogs and beasts of prey. Virtue herself, I think, groaned for these men’s fate, bewailing such utter defeat at the hands of vice (BJ 4.324–325).¹¹⁰

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¹⁰⁵ See Hayward (2002), ad loc; see also Barclay (2007, n. 640), who refers to the Shema (Deut. 6:4) and Diod. 1.94.2.
¹⁰⁶ Barclay (2007, n. 652) claims that the term is used only by Philo and Josephus and probably therefore has an Alexandrian origin. However, a number of earlier passages speak against this assumption, e.g. Arist. Met. 12.7, 1073a10; Diog. Laert. 4.17 (Polemon).
¹⁰⁸ This has been an important issue in recent scholarship, see e.g. Swartz (2012, 33–54), who refers to the rabbinic sources on the vestments.
¹⁰⁹ BJ 4.324.
¹¹⁰ Transl. Thackeray.
The fate of Jerusalem marks the end of the priestly topography, in which the sacred mingle with the profane. The high priest cast out naked figures the end of the salvation-narrative he embodied when dressed in his vestments. The phrase τῆς κοσμικῆς θρησκείας suggests that in Josephus’ view the worship was offered on behalf of the cosmos itself. The representation of creation and of the twelve tribes of Israel on the ceremonial garment is no longer possible. The cosmos is falling apart. This understanding is confirmed by Josephus’ account of Jesus, son of Thebuti, who handed over to the Romans (παραδίδοναι) two lights, tables, golden vessels, the curtains and the garments of the high priest that were stored in the Temple treasury (BJ 6.387–389). At this point Josephus omits all mention of the cosmological significance of the vestments. All these items were necessary for the maintenance of the cult, but without the priests and the Temple they have lost their meaning. Thus it is only logical that, following the destruction of the Temple, the terms used to qualify the purity and holiness of the vestments are missing in BJ

4. Conclusion

The writings of Flavius Josephus are considered an important witness of the last decades of the Jewish priesthood and the temple in Jerusalem. He devotes particular attention to details of the architecture of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem and the priestly vestments, which represented holiness and purity and which mediated an encounter with God, facilitated prayer and effected atonement. Josephus’ goal is to provide as precise a description as possible of the temple in Jerusalem and its priests, whose powerful actions are also demonstrated by their purity and vestments. During a guided city-tour through Jerusalem to the temple and Holy of Holies in BJ, Flavius Josephus, himself a priest, expounds the aniconic character of Jewish religion both to Jewish and to non-Jewish readers able to read Greek, and by idealising the temple of Solomon in AJ, its structure of the inner sanctuary, its walls and curtains, and the tent of the tabernacle, Josephus describes God’s indwelling and presence in the inner temple.

My interest here has been to emphasise the complexity of his linguistic strategy of ekphrasis in these two texts. This discussion of Josephus’ sacred terminology has endeavoured to demonstrate its complexity. This complexity reflects the historical reality: by transliterating Aramaic terms Josephus emphasizes the distinctiveness of Jewish religion and its priests. By using word-fields in Greek de-

noting purity, he draws on the language of the Greek leges sacrae, which increasingly focuses on moral purity after the beginning of the first century BCE. And by applying Graeco-Roman technical terms to the temple of Solomon, he relates the Jerusalem temple to the sacred architecture of his time. Thus, although he also emphasizes the exoticism and uniqueness of Jewish religion, Josephus demonstrates a similarity to Graeco-Roman religion. AJ suggests different dimensions of strangeness according to the different cultural backgrounds of its readership. By dint of allegorical interpretation, the office of the high priest is represented as reproducing the order of the cosmos as well as connoting the Jewish people in worship and sacrifice. At the same time, the sacred characters of the name of God are represented to the Jewish people and Roman political leaders in the high priestly vestments and especially the golden crown. High priests are therefore more than “perfect coat-stands”, to use a phrase of Utzschneider.¹¹² As far as Josephus is concerned, in wearing the high priestly vestments they embody the architecture of the Temple and render the divine world visible for Jewish people and Roman rulers.

However, he seems not to be interested in rebuilding the Jerusalem temple or in the ideal community of the priesthood. Instead, in AJ 8 he uses the Solomonic temple dedication prayer as evidence of the possibility of encountering God outside the Temple and beyond the actions of the priests; this prayer shifts God’s residence to heaven. The reference to God in heaven is not intended to create distance from God per se, but rather allows contact to be made beyond institutional cultic contexts through purity laws. Josephus is a priest in that he cultivates the transcendence of God as well as divine condescension (Kondeszendenz), namely the presence and visibility of God in the Jerusalem temple and the temple priesthood, as remembered history in the context of historiography.

References


¹¹² See Utzschneider (1988, 172), who ends his chapter with the remark: “Mit den Kleidern wird das Amt gemacht”. 


