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Reverse Circumcision in Hellenistic Judaism: The Case for a Gender Critical Reading

Erratum

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Reverse Circumcision in Hellenistic Judaism: The Case for a Gender Critical Reading

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I. Introduction

Biblical texts often contain quite graphic and explicit descriptions of female bodies. Male bodies, however, typically elude the gaze of male authors; this trend breaks in a few telling verses in 1 Maccabees regarding male circumcision. The key text reads, “And they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to the custom of the Greeks, and they *made for themselves foreskins*, and they abandoned the holy covenant” (1 Macc 1:14-15a).¹ This text raises two obvious questions: what does it mean to make a foreskin for oneself, and why would anyone ever do this?

Contemporary scholars have persuasively written about uncircumcision procedures- and the polemic against them- from the perspective of ethnic difference. The writing on uncircumcision procedures fails to include a discussion of the gender dynamics in play. In order to fully explore uncircumcision operations in Hellenistic Judaism, a gender critical lens must be applied. I will argue that

circumcision is not only an ethnic marker for Hellenistic Judeans. Instead, male circumcision is- in addition to an ethnic marker- the means by which Judean patriarchy is solidified and a key marker of Judean masculinity. I will argue that those who underwent epispasm did so as an attempt to perform Greek masculinity instead of Judean masculinity and that this attempt angered the practitioners of Judean masculinity.

A brief word must be said about exactly what I mean by the word “masculine.” I am defining masculinity as a set of behaviors practiced by which a person with a male body becomes a man.² Thus, I am not defining masculinity as an inherent category to

¹ Translation is my own. All other translations come from the NRSV unless otherwise stated.

² Whether or not a male body is a prerequisite to behave as masculine and be a man is a contestable issue. Could a person with a female body (or intersex body) perform masculine behaviors? Of course. But would that person be considered a “man” by the dominant culture? The answer to that question is much more difficult to ascertain and varies from culture to culture. Given that it is outside of the scope of this paper, I have decided to forgo this discussion and will primarily discuss masculinity as a set of behaviors performed by people who possess male bodies.

be born into (such as a male body) but a set of behaviors to perform.³ Masculine behaviors often vary across and within people groups. In any given culture, there are often several competing masculinities at play, and the dominant (i.e. hegemonic) form of masculinity is often the one practiced by those at the top of society with the most power and influence. Therefore, it is possible for hegemonic Judean masculinity to include a quite different set of behaviors than hegemonic Greek masculinity and that male bodies would have some degree of freedom to perform either Judean or Greek masculinity.

II. What is an Uncircumcision Operation?

Uncircumcision operation is a generic term that refers to several operations designed to undo the marks of circumcision on a male penis. The earliest known reference to the operation in Jewish writing is found in 1 Maccabees 1:11-15. Uncircumcision operations are mentioned in texts written from the second century BCE to the sixth century CE (1 Maccabees, Mishnah, Talmud), which is suggestive that the operations were practiced for more than five hundred years.

What exactly did the operations include? How does a person make for

³ On this point, I am indebted to the thought of R. W. Connell. See, R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995).

oneself a foreskin? There are two procedures in the ancient world designed to undo circumcision: infibulation and epispasm.⁴ Infibulation, according to Celsus, the first century medical author, involved drawing the skin around the penis forward to cover the glans and fastening it with a fibula or twine.⁵ Epispasm, which is often called the “Cadillac of corrective surgeries,” is the most effective procedure known to undo circumcision. Epispasm was a challenging operation: the surgeon would cut the skin on the shaft of the penis, pull it forward to cover the glans, and dress it carefully so that the skin would attach itself to the glans, leaving a foreskin. Bear in mind that this operation was practiced without anesthesia, though Celsus promises that the operation was “not so very painful.”⁶ There simply is not enough data to state whether 1 Maccabees refers to either infibulation or epispasm. It is possible that Hellenistic Judeans were practicing both infibulation and epispasm.⁷ For the sake of convenience, I will use the term epispasm generically as a substitute for “uncircumcision operations.”

⁴ Robert Hall, “Epispasm: Circumcision in Reverse,” *Bible Review* (1992): 54.

⁵ Hall, “Epispasm,” 54

⁶ Hall, “Epispasm,” 54

⁷ The Roman poet, Martial, mocks a Judean whose fibula fell out while bathing. See Hall, “Epispasm,” 54.

III. Scholarly Treatments of Epispasm in 1 Maccabees

Before engaging in a analysis of epispasm from a gender critical perspective, it is necessary to rehearse the scholarly positions on epispasm. Relatively little has been written on the topic, so it shall not take long to present an overview of the key scholarly treatments.

In his commentary on 1 Maccabees, Jonathan Goldstein briefly mentions epispasm: "In a Greek Gymnasium all the physical exercises and sports were performed in complete nudity... Many peoples of the Near East besides the Jews practiced circumcision, but Greeks tended to view it as an unseemly mutilation. Hence, some of the Hellenized Jewish youths who had to strip in the gymnasium were willing to submit to painful operations to disguise the fact that they had been circumcised."⁸ Goldstein rightly associates epispasm with the Greek Gymnasium, as does the author of 1 Maccabees. However, Goldstein utterly fails to account for the masculinities at play. He uses the terms "many peoples" and "Greeks" to disguise the fact that the text is talking about *men and male bodies*. Goldstein writes that "Hellenistic Jewish youths" underwent the operation, but this is not the case;

⁸ Jonathan Goldstein, *1 Maccabees: A New Translation, with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1976) 200. Goldstein is to some degree dependent upon Shurer on this point.

Hellenistic Jewish men underwent the operation in an effort to appease not the Greeks generally but Greek men, specifically.

Robert Hall's treatment of epispasm in 1 Maccabees is more robust than Goldstein's but still lacks an overt discussion about gender. Hall says:

"Some Jews probably submitted to epispasm because they shared the common Greek and Roman revulsion toward circumcision... Jews of means naturally wished to participate in gymnasium and bath. Not only were these a chief means of recreation, they also functioned as *hubs for business*. If Jews exercised or bathed while circumcised, they offended their gentile neighbors and submitted themselves to incredulous ridicule; if they did not attend, everyone knew why- and talked about it. Either way their *business would suffer*."⁹

Hall recognizes that epispasm is a means to attain greater economic power. Though he does not say so, publicly accruing economic power is typically a masculine behavior in Hellenistic Judea. Hall also recognizes that epispasm paved the way to greater social power: "Athletics constituted a chief avenue of social advancement for underclass boys... Since athletes exercised and competed without

⁹ Hall, "Epispasm," 54. Italics are mine.

clothes, this avenue was denied to those who were circumcised.”¹⁰ Females were prohibited from professional sporting, so the social advancement Hall discusses is a thoroughly masculine social advancement. Hall recognizes that epispasm was both ethnic, economic, and social, though he does not overtly recognize that it is also gendered.

Hershel Shanks is known as the world’s leading amateur biblical archaeologist, and he is the editor of the *Biblical Archaeology Review*. His treatment of uncircumcision operations is lacking fullness. Shanks writes, “In a number of cultures [circumcision] was a rite that prepared a man for marriage. Only in Judaism was it performed on an eight day-old boy. And it had *nothing to do with manhood or sex*, but was a sign of the covenant between God and the Jewish people.”¹¹ How could circumcision, practiced exclusively on male genitals, have nothing to do with manhood or sex? Shanks’s treatment of uncircumcision operations may be the most obviously blind to issues of masculinity, but he is not alone in treating the operation as being primarily due to ethnic pressures instead of gendered pressures. It is time to, against Shanks, discuss the thoroughly masculine element of circumcision, epispasm, and the polemic against it.

¹⁰ Hall, “Epispasm,” 54.

¹¹ Shanks, “A Flip of the Foreskin,” 1. Italics are mine.

IV. Judean Circumcision and Masculinity

How one views epispasm relates to how that person understands circumcision. It is necessary to zoom out and reflect upon circumcision in the wider Judean world from the perspective of masculinity. Against Shanks, who argues that circumcision had nothing to do with manhood, I will argue that male circumcision, a surgery performed exclusively on male bodies, has everything to do with masculinity. A brief history of Judahite worship of YHWH and male circumcision will reveal the gender ideology implicit to the operation.

Although it is likely that Judeans inherited circumcision from other people groups in the wider Near East, Judean circumcision in the Hellenistic era had several distinct features.¹² Uniquely, Judahite texts command the forced circumcision of all males while they are still infants (Genesis 17:12). That Judeans were practicing infant circumcision on all males in the infancy stage is distinct from any other circumcision practice in the wider Near East in which only a few males were circumcised as they transitioned from boyhood to manhood¹³. The means by which Judean circumcision gained its uniqueness is the subject of much debate, and in order to provide an

¹² David Gollaher, *Circumcision: A History of the World’s Most Controversial Surgery* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 2.

¹³ Gollaher, *Circumcision*, 3.

adequate answer, something must be said about the masculinity of YHWH and his worship in Judah.

That YHWH was initially an embodied male deity before his rise to the disembodied monotheistic God is a well established norm in contemporary scholarship. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz boldly proclaims:

“The thought of God having a penis is shocking. Most Jews and Christians think of God the father as lacking a body and hence as beyond sexuality. Without a body, God obviously can have no sexual organ? But from where does the idea of a disembodied God come? What if, historically speaking, it is discomfort with the idea of God’s penis that has generated the idea of an incorporeal God? What if this uneasiness flows from the contradictions inherent in men’s relationship with a God who is explicitly male?”¹⁴

The embodied masculinity of YHWH within a heteronormative culture problematizes male bodies. That YHWH was once imagined as having a male body and performer of hegemonic masculinity hardly needs argument anymore, though a few words can be said on the issue. Thomas Römer argues persuasively that YHWH was initially a southern war and storm god before his

¹⁴ Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *God’s Phallus and other Problems for Men and Monotheism* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1994), 1.

incorporation into Judahite worship; these behaviors are thoroughly masculine.¹⁵ Further, representations of YHWH, albeit rare, depict him with a male body, and the drawings of YHWH found at Kuntillet Arjud establish that: a). YHWH had a male body and a penis and b). YHWH possessed a female partner, Asherah.¹⁶ Clearly, YHWH was once imagined as possessing a male body and performing Judean masculinity.

Having established the masculinity of YHWH, it is time to reflect upon the meaning of his masculinity as he is elevated to a monotheistic status.¹⁷ There are two fundamental properties of Judahite culture in the exilic period that together problematize male bodies as YHWH becomes the sole deity of worship. First, Judahite culture is patriarchal and privileges males as YHWH’s servants and representatives. Second, Judahite culture was heteronormative and homophobic (Lev 20: 13).¹⁸ Due to the heteronormativity of Judahite culture,

¹⁵ Thomas Römer, *The Invention of God*, trans. Raymond Geuss (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 47.

¹⁶ Römer, *The Invention of God*, 164.

¹⁷ I am indebted to the work of Howard Eilberg-Schwartz for illuminating this issue for me.

¹⁸ Applying the modern terms heteronormative and homophobic to ancient culture is obviously anachronistic, though it should be no more so than applying the modern terms pantheist or monotheist. Suffice it to say that most elites in the culture would not have looked favorably upon male-male sexual relationships.

women were the logical primary intimates and servants of the male deity, YHWH. However, allowing females primary intimacy would destabilize the patriarchal religious system.¹⁹ Oddly enough, YHWH's masculinity initially destabilized Judean masculinity and patriarchy. Elite Judahite men countered this problem in three ways. First, they got rid of YHWH's body so as to reduce the blinding obviousness of his phallus and masculinity (hence, aniconism). Second, they embellished the notion of female impurity (Lev 12:5, 15: 25-29). And finally, they feminized male bodies through genital mutilation and ultimately circumcision so as to make men proper partners for YHWH.²⁰ I will argue that circumcision in Judahite culture represents symbolic emasculation and submission to YHWH. This emasculation ultimately serves to reinforce patriarchy, in that it secures male privilege to primary intimacy to YHWH and symbolizes submission to the ultimate patriarch, YHWH. It is true that Judean men are submitting and taking a secondary position. However, this submission establishes a hierarchy in which YHWH is on top, Judean men submit to YHWH through circumcision and Judean females submit to both YHWH and Judean men.

Understanding circumcision as an act of submission is not particularly uncommon in biblical studies and ought

¹⁹ This point will be further substantiated below.

²⁰ Eilberg-Schwartz, *God's Phallus*, 137-162.

not be regarded as too imaginative have explanatory power. Steven Weitzman, for instance, argues that circumcision is rightly understood as a "rite of domination."²¹ David's forced circumcision of the Philistines is not an attempt to make the Philistines into Judahites (which would be ethnic in nature) so much as it is about symbolically dominating the masculinity of the Philistines (1 Sam 18: 25). On that note, the circumcision of the Hivites in Genesis 34 is not actually an attempt to make the Hivites into Judahites (which would be ethnic in nature) but is a trick to dominate the masculinity of the Hivites and kill them (Gen. 34). Josephus and Ptolemy claim that the Hasmoneans forced circumcision upon conquered Gentiles, which Weitzman argues is as an act of domination upon defeated enemies rather than an attempt to make the enemies into Judeans.²² Circumcision, then, is best understood as an act of domination or forced submission upon inferior men. YHWH's command for Judahite men to circumcise themselves (Gen. 17) should be read as Judean men's symbolic submission to the superior man, YHWH. Eilberg Schwartz writes, "[Circumcision] is ideally an injury inflicted by the father on the son to signify their submission to God."²³ This submission may seem

²¹ Steven Weitzman, "Forced Circumcision and the Shifting Role of Gentiles in Hasmonean Ideology," *HTR* 92 (1999): 37.

²² Weitzman, "Forced Circumcision," 41.

²³ Eilberg-Schwartz, "God's Phallus," 157.

illogical, but it is a necessity for men to attain intimacy with YHWH as his representatives and servants.

That symbolic emasculation and genital mutilation is a prerequisite to male connection with YHWH is implicit within several biblical texts.²⁴ For instance, Jacob is blessed by God after his wrestling match at Peniel, and he says, "I have seen God face to face, and I have prevailed." (Gen 32: 30). However, Jacob is only blessed after a genital injury, in which God struck him in the hollow of his loins (Gen 32: 25).²⁵ Further, genital injury and blood is the mechanism by which Moses' life is spared and his status as YHWH's representative established, after which Moses speaks with YHWH "face to face" (Exod. 4:21-26, 33:11). Genesis 17, then, is rightly understood as YHWH's command for Judahite men to undergo genital injury in order to be his servants and representatives. Circumcision is an act of submission to YHWH that allows for intimacy between the male deity and Judean males. Or, as Eilberg-Schwartz puts it, "The blood of circumcision is a symbolic acknowledgment that a man's masculinity belongs to God," and this acknowledgement allows Judean men to serve as God's intimate

²⁴ Once again I am indebted to Eilberg-Schwartz for illuminating this trend. See esp, Eilberg-Schwartz, "God's Phallus," 151-155.

²⁵ On the discussion of exactly which body part of Jacob's was struck, see Eilberg-Schwartz, "God's Phallus," 153.

representatives.²⁶

Circumcision, though it is emasculating, does not stifle patriarchy but facilitates it by allowing male bodies the place of primary intimacy with YHWH. Men's intimacy to YHWH does not necessarily lead to a patriarchal religious system. However, it does lay the foundation upon which a patriarchal religious system can be built. Maleness becomes a prerequisite to representing and serving YHWH, whether as his priest or his king. The temple and the palace, then, necessarily become male spaces where power and literacy are concentrated. It is in these male spaces that texts are written which normalize male experience, marginalize females and generate patriarchal household, economic, and social regulations. I am by no means arguing that all of this social organization that I am labeling "patriarchal" is completely dependent upon male circumcision. Social systems are far too complex to blame any one factor. However, I am arguing that male intimacy to YHWH is secured through circumcision and that this intimacy gives men the power to shape a religious and political system in a way that benefits men.

Genesis 17, written by the male priestly writer, well illustrates the connection between male intimacy to YHWH, female marginalization, and patriarchy. In the text, YHWH says, "This is my covenant, which you shall

²⁶ Eilberg-Schwartz, "God's Phallus," 160.

keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised" (Gen. 17:10). That the male priest has the power to speak for YHWH is dependent upon male intimacy to YHWH. Notice that the covenant is circumcision, which means that the priest, in this text, *excludes females from participation in the covenant*. To be excluded from the covenant with the tribal deity is discriminatory in and of itself, but this exclusion also gives males the right to speak for YHWH and invent household codes that benefit men to the expense of women. Obviously, male circumcision alone is not to blame for Judean patriarchy, but it is a symbol that supports the social system of domination. Harry Brod argues that circumcision is the means by which patriarchy is transmitted intergenerationally. Brod writes: "To be a Jewish man means to be circumcised... For circumcision is above all a male-to-male transmission of Jewish identity, one that dramatically centers Judaism on fathers and sons and marginalizes mothers and daughters."²⁷

Circumcision is YHWH's genital injury inflicted on Judean men in order to have intimate relationship with them. To be clear, circumcision is surely functional as an ethnic marker as well as masculine symbol. To emphasize the

²⁷ Harry Brod, "Circumcision and the Erection of the Patriarchy," *Men and Masculinities in Christianity and Judaism* (2009): 356.

gender ideology supported by the operation is not to dismiss the ethnic ideology that is surely present. Nevertheless, what remains and must be clearly stated is that circumcision is the answer to the problem of YHWH's masculinity in a heteronormative society. Forced circumcision of Judean males is a symbolic unmanning and submission to the male deity. However, this unmanning serves to stabilize male intimacy with YHWH and the patriarchal religious system that depends upon males as the exclusive representatives of YHWH.

V. Circumcision and Greek Masculinity

While circumcision was a prerequisite for Judean masculinity, an intact foreskin was a necessary prerequisite for Greek masculinity. A simple scan of Greek sculptures reveals that the ideal male form included a long, tapered, uncircumcised foreskin.²⁸ Ancient Greeks are famous for their celebration of male beauty, and those who mutilated their male form were subject to mockery and isolation.²⁹ Further, that there were several procedures within Greek antiquity known to lengthen a foreskin suggests its necessity as a component of Greek masculinity.³⁰ Thus, while to be Judean

²⁸ Thomas Hubbard, ed., *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook of Basic Documents* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 267-268.

²⁹ Glick, "Marked in Your Flesh," 31.

³⁰ Hall, "Epispasm," 54.

man meant to be circumcised, Greek manhood required an unmutated foreskin. One could not simultaneously perform the dominant form of both Greek masculinity and Judean masculinity, and for those living in Hellenistic Judea, a choice was required.

VI. Epispasm Reconsidered from a Gender Critical Perspective

Now that circumcision has been discussed within its varying Greek and Judean contexts, it is time to take a running start at the initial topic: epispasm of Judean men. The practice was widespread enough to receive mention by the writer of 1 Maccabees, the Mishnah, the Talmud, and Moses Maimonides.³¹ Although the operation may have been common, it was not well received by the writers of surviving texts (i.e. elite Jewish males). For instance, Maimonides writes, "Anyone who elongates his foreskin is denied a share in the world to come."³²

Scholarly work on epispasm has painted an incomplete picture in that it has discussed only the ethnic dimensions of the operation and not the gender dimensions of the operation. Two simple questions guided this project. Why, from a gender critical perspective, would Judean men opt to undergo a painful uncircumcision operation, and why did the writers of surviving texts criticize the operation so

heavily?

I have argued that circumcision stabilizes Judean masculinity and patriarchy; why would men choose to "make for themselves a foreskin" (1 Macc 1:15) and destabilize patriarchy from which they benefit? My answer is certainly not that these men undergoing epispasm are proto-feminists resisting the patriarchy. Instead, I contend that they are merely opting to benefit from Greek masculinity over and against Judean masculinity. Robert Hall argues that circumcision excluded a man from Greek baths, athletics, and citizenship.³³ Given that Greek baths were the location at which business deals were struck; that athletics offered the opportunity for social advancement; and that citizenship was a prerequisite to hold political power, a Judean male's exclusion from those male spaces would have meant financial, social, and political suffering. Thus, Judean men opting for uncircumcision are not subverting Judean patriarchy as much as they are simply choosing Greek masculine status over Judean masculine status. They are giving up their Judean masculinity and the benefits it confers in order to reap the benefits conferred by Greek masculinity, for which an intact foreskin is a prerequisite. It is not about defying patriarchy and masculinity but a selection of which cultural type of hegemonic masculinity to perform and benefit from. Men who underwent

³¹ Hall, "Epispasm," 55.

³² Hall, "Epispasm," 55.

³³ Hall, "Epispasm," 54.

epispasm did so because in their cost benefit analysis, to be a Greek man was more beneficial than to be a Judean man, and they must have thought that the cost of the painful operation would be worth the benefits reaped.

There are two quite obvious reasons why epispasm upset elite Judean men. First, Judean men selecting Greek masculinity over Judean masculinity insulted Judean men who continued to perform Judean masculinity. As Harry Brod reminds us, "To be a Jewish man means to be circumcised."³⁴ Therefore, to forgo practicing circumcision is to forgo practicing Judean masculinity, and just as modern protest masculinities upset practitioners of the dominant masculinity, Judeans undoing their circumcision upsets the practitioners of Judean masculinity.

Epispasm upset elite Judeans not only because it destabilized Judean hegemonic masculinity but also because epispasm dismantled the hierarchal social system from which elite Judean males benefited. Recall that circumcision is not merely an ethnic marker; it is the means by which Judean men submit to YHWH as the ultimate man. Broadly speaking, Judean society was a three tiered hierarchy in which men submitted to YHWH and women submitted to men.³⁵ Judean men opting

to undo their circumcision would have put YHWH's masculinity at risk, and if YHWH's place in the hierarchy crumbled, men's place in the hierarchy could lose stability.

Further, circumcision aided in solving the problem of YHWH's masculinity and male intimacy to YHWH because it is through symbolic submission that Judean men are allowed primary access to YHWH in place of females. Circumcision secures men's place as servants and representatives of YHWH, as exclusive participants in YHWH's covenant. If circumcision was undone, the exclusively male priesthood and the patriarchal regulations supported by it could be called into question. Judean men who undid their circumcision contributed to the destabilization of the patriarchal religious system. Therefore, it should not be surprising to historians that the writers of patriarchal religious texts have some harsh words for Judeans who undo their circumcision.

That epispasm destabilizes Judean masculinity and patriarchy is the best explanation for the polemic found against uncircumcision. This explains why the writer of 1 Maccabees, who is in the priestly line, declares that those who undergo epispasm have "abandoned the covenant" (1 Macc 1:15). Further, this explanation best makes sense of why the author of 1 Maccabees praises Mattathias and his

³⁴ Brod, "The Erection of the Patriarchy," 356.

³⁵ The situation in reality is much more complex than this, and a complete hierarchy must account for issues of class, sexual orientation,

ability, etc.

friends for “forcibly circumcising all the uncircumcised children they found within the borders of Israel” (1 Macc 2: 46).³⁶ Even more, 2 Baruch, praises Josiah for being “firm in the law at that time so that he left no one uncircumcised” (2 Bar. 66:5). For the writer of 2 Baruch and 1 Maccabees, an uncircumcised male in Judea poses a problem for all men. These writers praise those who forcibly circumcise Judean boys because circumcision stabilizes Judean masculinity and patriarchy.

Epispasm, then, is well understood only when discussed in the context of masculinity. Epispasm is an attempt to become a Greek man instead of a Judean man. Those who underwent the surgery did so because the benefits of Greek manhood outweighed those of Judean manhood, and elite Judean males opposed epispasm because the operation destabilized Judean masculinity and patriarchy.

VII. Conclusion

I have offered a reading of epispasm found within 1 Maccabees that attempts to emphasize the gender ideology implicit within the surgery and polemic against it. I argue that circumcision functioned as a stabilizing factor for Judean masculinity and patriarchy. Judean men who undid their circumcision destabilized Judean

masculinity and patriarchy and thus attracted negative attention from elite Judean males. My reading is directly opposed to the writing of Hershel Shanks who proposes that circumcision had, “nothing to do with manhood or sex,”³⁷ and a nuance to the position of Jonathan Goldstein and Robert Hall who emphasize the ethnic dynamics at play as opposed to the gender dynamics. I hope to have shown that circumcision and uncircumcision cannot be understood with only an ethnic lens and must also be inspected through a gender critical lens. In no way do I suppose that talking about epispasm from a masculine approach negates the ethnic elements of the discussion. My explanation of epispasm is both gendered and ethnic, emphasizing that Judean men undergoing epispasm are opting for Greek masculinity over Judean masculinity. I contend that a complete discussion of epispasm in the Hellenistic era ought to include a discussion of gender and ethnicity and that to do anything less is to tell only a half-truth.

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³⁶ Translation comes from the NRSV.

³⁷ Shanks, “A Flip of the Foreskin,” 1.

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