

JOSEPHUS

Here we will examine what evidence regarding the subject of matrilineal and patrilineal descent that can be found in the writings of Josephus. Briefly, for those not familiar with Josephus, he was a first century Jewish historian who fought in the Jewish wars with the Romans, was captured by them and later befriended and was patronized by the Emperor. He was a Cohen (priest) on both sides of his family and descended from the Hasmonean dynasty on his mother's side. His writings have proven to be eminently reliable and have frequently been confirmed with archaeological evidence. He wrote four works, that survived, which are a brief autobiography; Jewish Antiquities, which tells Jewish history starting from creation and continuing from where the Tanach leaves off; The Jewish War, which describes the great war the Jews had with the Romans in the first century that resulted in the destruction of the Second Temple, mostly from his own eyewitness accounts; and finally "Against Apion," which is basically a diatribe intended to counter some contemporary writers who Josephus felt had cast aspersion on Jewish culture and history. We will be looking at his works only as they relate to the topic of matrilineal and patrilineal descent, however.

"Jewish Antiquities" starts by retelling the stories of the Bible from Creation all the way through to its end. His telling varies slightly from the version we know as the Bible and there were a few minor points of interest in it regarding our topic. However, I am choosing not to discuss those here because the version that has been accepted as "official" for religious purposes is the Bible, so we should go by that. "Antiquities" then picks up where the Bible leaves off, which is where we'll begin.

I will first address cases of intermarriage or miscegenation that I have found in Josephus' writings. The first I found was in Antiquities, Book 13, chapter 7:4:228 [Josephus has been codified into verses similar to the bible to simplify referencing]. It describes the killing of the then-ruler and priest of Judea, Simon the Maccabee, at a feast by his "son-in-law Ptolemy." Ptolemy is the name given to the rulers of Egypt at that time. So, we know that the daughter of this Simon, who was Jewish, was married to a non-Jew. There is no description of their relationship or any children they had. However, given the fact that after killing her father, he then proceeded to kidnap, torture and kill his wife's mother and 2 of her brothers, it's not likely that he would have been very open to having his wife impose her religion on their children. After this spectacular performance, he escaped to Philadelphia in Egypt and, given his temperament, his wife no doubt obeyed him.

The next example we find of an intermarriage is in Book 14, chapter 7:4:126. It takes place at the end of the Hasmonean dynasty. Another Ptolemy, described as the son of Menneus and ruler of Chalcis, which is an area of Lebanon, gives refuge to the remnants of the Hasmonean dynasty, who were under threat from Pompey, the Roman Emperor. Ptolemy's son falls in love with and marries one of the daughters of the Hasmonean ruler, Aristobulus II, named Alexandra. However, Ptolemy killed this son and then married her himself. They did produce at least one son, Lysanius, who became king over the area known as Iturea. This area is not traditionally a part of Judea or Israel, although later the kings of Judea did come to control it and the kings of Iturea paid tribute to the Judaen kings. Iturea is located in what is now known as the Bakaa Valley. Lebanese history considers the rulers Ptolemy and Lysanius to be Hellenistic rulers. No mention is made in Josephus of the religious practices of this Lysanius, but the people he ruled over were Arabs and it's not likely that he would have practiced Judaism, as that would have alienated his subjects and threatened his rule, if he even had wanted to in the first place.

The next character that appears to help us examine our subject is Herod the Great. I have read many discussions on the Jewish status of Herod. One thing is for certain is that Herod was not ethnically Jewish at

all. His father was an Idumean, or Edomite. Idumea had been conquered and the people forcibly converted to Judaism by the Hasmonean ruler, John Hyrcanus, sometime in the second century BCE. So, Herod's father, Antipater, was certainly Jewish by religion. Herod's mother is generally accepted to have been the daughter of a prominent Arab, named Cypros. It's commonly held that this woman was not Jewish. However, Josephus contradicts himself as to her exact origins. In *Antiquities*, Book 14, chapter 7:3:121, Josephus says that she was an Idumean. If that is the case, then she would have been Jewish because the Idumeans had been converted already for about a century. In his "Jewish Wars," he says that she was an Arab [Book 1, chapter 8:9:181]. Making her probably not Jewish. But we will say for the sake of argument that she wasn't Jewish, because that is the commonly held belief. Herod became King after the death of his father, who had been the de-facto ruler of Judea in the name of the High Priest, Hyrcanus. He became King in a power struggle and I have seen some written articles claiming that this had something to do with his mother not being Jewish. But there is no indication of this. There was almost always a struggle whenever there was a succession, and that is not unique to Jewish history. For example, when the Hasmonean ruler John Hyrcanus died, his sons Aristobulus I and Alexander fought over power and likewise when this Alexander died, his sons Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II fought, as well, and none of them ever had their Jewishness questioned. Many Jews supported Herod, including the High Priest, Hyrcanus. Proof of this is that Herod married the granddaughter of Hyrcanus, Mariamme. Being that she was a Cohen, this marriage would not have been allowed if Herod was not Jewish. The struggle was between Herod and Antigonus, a Hasmonean who would have had the right to succession by birth. However, this Antigonus had been living for some time under the protection of Lysanius of Iruetea and hadn't been in Judea for many years. In *Antiquities*, Book 14, chapter 15:2:403, Josephus describes a proclamation Antigonus made in pleading his cause. He says,

“ It would be contrary to their own notion of right if they gave the kingship to Herod who was a commoner and an Idumean, that is, a half-Jew, when they ought to offer it to those who were of the royal family, as was their custom.”

We don't know, of course, if these were the exact words of Antigonus or merely paraphrasing by Josephus. But, both of these men were Cohens and thus intimately familiar with Jewish law, and they uttered the ineffable name of half-Jew. [any Orthodox Jews reading please take a moment to regain control of your faculties before continuing] In examining the meaning of this statement we have to look at the whole context. In the original, the Greek word used is an amalgam of half and Jew, without any hyphen. It could be that this was meant literally, that only one of his parents was Jewish, or it could have been an idiomatic expression meaning "quasi-Jew" or "sort-of-Jew," intended to cast aspersion on his descent from converts. For example, in English you might say "I'm half-asleep" meaning that I'm almost asleep but not quite, right? The speaker was insulting Herod in several ways, referring to his non-royal status and his Idumean ethnicity. It seems more likely that this was in fact intended to mean "quasi-Jew" due to his Idumean ethnicity because the speaker uses it to elaborate on his description of Herod as an Idumean, saying "...an Idumean, that is, a half-Jew." The Idumeans had only been part of the Jewish nation for a couple of generations at the time of Herod's ascendancy to the throne and while history would prove the union to be everlasting (the Idumeans fought in the Jewish War with the Romans), at that time many Jews probably were suspicious of their loyalty. However, either way you wish to read it, it proves that there was no such custom of exclusive matrilineal descent. If taken literally, then it means that there was such a thing as a half-Jew, which the Rabbinical custom of matrilineal descent precludes. Or, if taken idiomatically, it means that Herod was Jewish by religion, if not by ethnicity, and that matrilineal descent did not apply (assuming his mother wasn't Jewish). There is no other mention of Herod's enemies questioning his Jewishness. Throughout Josephus' writings the objection by the opposition is always explained as being based on the fact that he wasn't from the royal family. Antigonus, who called him a half-Jew, was his rival and statements made by rivals who have a

personal interest in defaming their enemy can never be taken very seriously.

Further evidence of Herod's Jewishness can be found in the marriages of his full sister, Salome. Her first marriage was to an Idumean, which marriage Herod arranged. Her husband's name was Costobarus and Herod made him governor of Idumea. Salome divorced him because he had wanted to raise a rebellion against Herod and preclude the Idumeans from having to follow Jewish customs and law, which had been imposed upon them by Hyrcanus. This is described in *Antiquities*, Book 15, chapter 7:9-10. Later, in *Antiquities*, Book 16, chapter 7:6:225, a potential marriage is discussed between Salome and an Arabian sheik named Sylleus. Josephus writes that it was placed as a condition of the match that Sylleus convert to Judaism, which Sylleus refused to agree to, and the marriage thus never took place. It's hard to imagine any reason for imposing this condition unless Salome was Jewish and, since she and Herod had the same mother and father, Herod must have been also.

I have also seen articles that question Herod's Jewishness because he introduced some Roman customs into Judea, such as placing a Roman herald, the eagle, above the entrance to the Temple grounds and building Roman-style gymnasiums. But this cannot be viewed as anything more than political machinations. Herod undertook massive building projects in Judea and fortified the Temple greatly. He would never have been allowed to do this if the Romans had felt threatened at all. Herod was nothing more than an astute politician. When the Hasmonean ruler Aristobulus, before him, had flouted Roman directives, Jews lost their independence to Rome. The tragic destruction of the Temple and Jewish civilization almost a century after Herod's death was a result of the same misjudgements of the Jews. Herod was a realist and knew where to give in order to get in other places. The Jews owed him a great debt. Under his rule they were able to maintain their temple and continue their customs, for the most part, which many other civilizations Rome conquered were not able to do. After his death he acquired the monniker "the Great," with good reason. It was all downhill for the Jews after him. Future generations certainly claimed him. In *Antiquities* Book 20, chapter 8:7:173, Josephus describes a dispute that arose between the Jews and Syrians that were then living in the city of Caesarea, long after Herod the Great's death. It reads as follows:

“And now it was that a great rebellion arose between the Jews that inhabited Caesarea, and the Syrians who dwelt there also, concerning their equal rights as citizens; for the Jews claimed the preeminence, because Herod their king was the builder of Caesaria, and because he was by birth a Jew. Now the Syrians did not deny what was alleged about Herod; but they said that Caesaria was formerly called Strato's tower and that there was not one Jewish inhabitant.”

Herod had nine wives and produced fourteen children. Some of them were married to non-Jews and there is nothing in Josephus' writings to indicate that the children of women who were not native-born Jews were considered not Jewish. I don't wish to digress into minutiae, so anyone who wishes to know the particulars can read "Antiquities" themselves. Herod's posterity is discussed in Books 17-20. Something I did notice, however, is that when one of his female posterity was marrying a non-Jew there was always an insistence that the man convert to Judaism and become circumcised. But there is no mention of any such requirement when Herod's male posterity marries a non-Jewish female. One reason for this would have been that the custom of mikveh immersion for conversion to Judaism had not yet been adopted and therefore there was no ritual for women to convert. But it also indicates that it wasn't important for the woman to be of the religion, only the man. One important instance that is worth mentioning is related by Josephus in *Antiquities*, Book 19, chapter 7. Herod's grandson, Herod Agrippa I, has become king of Judea. An incident ensues,

as described by Josephus.

“But Agrippa’s temper was mild, and equally liberal to all men. He was humane to foreigners, and made them sensible of his liberality. He was in like manner rather of a gentle and compassionate temper. Accordingly, he loved to live continually at Jerusalem, and was exactly careful in the observance of the laws of his country. He therefore kept himself entirely pure; nor did any day pass over his head without its appointed sacrifice. However, there was a certain man of the Jewish nation at Jerusalem, who appeared to be very accurate in the knowledge of the law. His name was Simon. This man got together an assembly, while the king was absent at Caesarea, and had the insolence to accuse him of unholy living, and that he might be justly excluded out of the temple, since it belonged to only native Jews. But the general of Agrippa’s army informed him that Simon had made such a speech to the people. So the king sent for him; and as he was sitting in the theater, he directed him to sit down by him, and said to him with a low and gentle voice. ‘What is there done in this place that is contrary to the law?’ But he had nothing to say for himself, but begged his pardon. So the king was more easily reconciled to him than one could have imagined, as esteeming mildness a better quality in a king than anger, and knowing that moderation is more becoming in great men than passion. So he made Simon a small present and dismissed him.”

What did this Simon mean when he called Herod Agrippa I not a “native Jew”? Let’s examine his ancestry. His father was Aristobulus, the son of Herod the Great and Mariamme, a Cohen of the Hasmonean dynasty. His mother was Bernice, the daughter of Herod the Great’s sister, Salome, and her first husband, Costobarus. In examining the idea of exclusive matrilineal descent, it could be argued that his maternal and paternal great-grandmother (his parents were first-cousins, thus this was one and the same person), that is Herod the Great’s mother, wasn’t Jewish (if that is in fact the case), and that therefore this Simon was referring to a custom of matrilineal descent in order to declare him not a “native Jew.” But Josephus never says this. If there was such a custom, this would have been a perfect opportunity for him to invoke it. But he doesn’t. He could have been referring to some racial impurity regarding his maternal grandfather, Costobarus. Costobarus, as I have already stated was an Idumean, which made him a Jew via the forcible conversion of that nation. But Costobarus had wanted to reject Judaism, so that could be the “impurity” that this Simon was alluding to. If by “native Jew” this Simon meant not ethnically Jewish, that is, descended from Idumean converts, his comment has nothing to do with which line, maternal or paternal, because it would have been specified if that were the case. It could have been that Simon viewed the conversion of the Idumeans as invalid because it was forced. Perhaps he was referring to Agrippa’s mixed ethnicity, but it was clearly not a “matrilineal thing.” Maybe he wasn’t referring to his ascendancy at all, but merely to a method of his religious observance that he took issue with. Josephus mentions in the first line that this Herod Agrippa was “humane to foreigners,” which this Simon may have considered a betrayal of the Jewish nation. Most likely he was just a disgruntled egomaniac trying to stir up trouble and nothing more. Also worth noting is that this Agrippa married the daughter of the then High Priest, who didn’t call into question his Jewishness. In any case, it is clear from the tone of the narrative that Josephus, who was a Cohen and very well versed in Jewish law, thought that this accusation about Agrippa was unfounded and downright prepos-

terous.

In all fairness, I don't think we can make any definitive conclusions as to what Jewish customs were at that time based on the behavior of royalty, because they obviously have privileges that commoners don't have. But that is all we have to go on. Josephus doesn't really talk about commoners. There is only one instance of an intermarriage between commoners in his writings. It occurs in Antiquities, Book 18, chapter 9:5. He relates a story of some Jews living in Babylon. A pair of brothers had risen to positions of importance and one of them married a non-Jew. His relations and entourage urge him to send her back to her relatives because she has brought her idols with her and continues to worship them. But there is no mention of any children so we cannot deduce anything from this story.

After this examination of instances of intermarriages, the next aspect of Josephus' narrative that concerns us is the infamous description that he makes of the various sects of Judaism that existed and competed with each other at that time, the Essenes, Sadducees and Pharisees. Josephus' writings end with the destruction of the second Temple in the Jewish war with the Romans. Judaism emerged from the rubble as almost entirely different religion than it had been. The Pharisees won out and are responsible for bringing us the Talmud. Josephus goes into explanations of some of their philosophical differences regarding the afterlife, etc., but I won't repeat them because they aren't relevant to the topic of matrilineal descent. What is relevant is how and why the Talmud came to dictate Jewish religious life, because from there is the concept of matrilineal descent derived.

Josephus speaks most highly of the Essenes. He praises their morality and ascetic existence. Some of them were monastic and others married. Ritual cleansing was an important part of their practices. Mikveh immersion for conversion to Judaism and Christian baptism undoubtedly are derived from them. But this sect didn't seem to have much concern for imposing their beliefs on other Jews. The real power struggle was between the Sadducees and Pharisees. Josephus relates the fundamental differences between the two in Antiquities, Book 13, chapter 10:6:297-298 as follows:

“What I would now explain is this, that the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the laws of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them, and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers. And concerning these things it is that great disputes and differences have arisen among them, while the Sadducees are able to persuade none but the rich, and have not the populace obsequious to them, but the Pharisees have the multitude on their side.”

The first thing we notice here is that the Pharisees' traditions, which became the Talmud, were NOT derived from the Torah, contrary to what their modern-day equivalents, the Orthodox, claim. The second thing we take away is that it was the common people that backed the Pharisees. Why? The average person was a farmer and uneducated. Hebrew, the language of the Torah, had been a dead language already for several centuries. Aramaic was the lingua franca of the Jews at this time. Thus, the average person couldn't read the Torah themselves. They relied on a few people, who were proto-rabbis, to specialize in this field and tell them what it said. This system gives complete control to the few. They could tell the masses whatever they wanted. The obsessive rituals the proto-rabbis developed, very few of which are actually found in the Torah, were a form of mind control devised to retain power. Creating a system where the average person had to come to them to ask how to eat, sleep and crap suited their purposes. We can see this unfortunate

tradition still in practice today. Outside of Israel, very few Jews can actually understand the original writing of the Torah or Talmud, so they just let the Rabbis tell them what to do. Almost all Jews today believe the Orthodox claim that their practices are “real” Judaism and what has always been practiced, while Reform and other branches are modern inventions. That’s complete bullshit, but since no one knows how to dispute them, they just believe them.

Josephus says in his brief autobiography that he studied as a teenager with all three sects of Judaism and then allied himself to the Pharisees. Why he did is apparent from his descriptions of them. He mainly writes of the grip that they had on the common people. For example, in Antiquities, Book 18, chapter 2:3:14-15 and 4:16-17:

“They also believe that souls have an immortal rigor in them, and that under the earth there will be rewards or punishments, according as they have lived virtuously or viciously in this life; and the latter are to be detained in an everlasting prison, but that the former shall have power to revive and live again; on account of which doctrines they are able greatly to persuade the body of the people; and whatever they do about divine worship, prayers and sacrifices, they perform them according to their direction; insomuch that the cities give great attestations to them on account of their entire virtuous conduct, both in the actions of their lives and their discourses also. But the doctrine of the Sadducees is this: That souls die with the bodies; nor do they regard the observation of anything besides what the law enjoins them; for they think it an instance of virtue to dispute with those teachers of philosophy whom they frequent: but this doctrine is received by but a few, yet by those still of the greatest dignity. But they are able to do almost nothing of themselves; for when they become magistrates, as they are unwillingly and by force sometimes obliged to be, they bind themselves to the notions of the Pharisees, because the multitude would not otherwise bear them.”

Here we start to get some insight into why Josephus went along with the Pharisees. He was an aristocrat and his natural alliance would have been with the Sadducees. His writings speak most complimentary of the Essenes. In the “Jewish War” Book 2, chapter 8 he goes into a long, very adoring, almost awestruck description of their lives and practices. He does say some nice things of the Pharisees, but nothing special. But Josephus was ambitious. He became the governor of Galilee and was a general in the war with the Romans. From this passage that I have just cited we see that he couldn’t have achieved those things if he hadn’t been a Pharisee. This description of the two sects illuminates the reasons why the poor masses followed the Pharisees. They promised the miserable, tired, and poor an afterlife whereas the comfortable and content needed no such comforting thoughts. The Pharisees were the Tammy Faye Bakers and Jimmy Swagarts of their day. Many aristocrats, like Josephus, went along with them for the same reason that American presidents always make public claims of their personal faith, in order to ingratiate themselves to the masses. They need to appear to have the “common touch.” Josephus mentions several anecdotes that further elaborate on the Pharisees’ stranglehold on the populace. For example, in Antiquities Book 13, chapter 10:5-6, he describes a conflict that arose between the Hasmonean ruler Hyrcanus and the Pharisees. Hyrcanus was a very successful ruler, was also the High Priest, and brought a lot of prosperity to the Jewish nation. Josephus

continues:

“However, this prosperous state of affairs moved the Jews to envy Hyrcanus; but they that were the worst disposed to him were the Pharisees, who were one of the sects of the Jews, as we have informed already. These have so great a power over the multitude, that when they say anything against the king, or against the high priest, they are presently believed. Now Hyrcanus was a disciple of theirs, and greatly beloved by them. And when he once invited them to a feast, and entertained them very kindly, when he saw them in good humour, he began to say to them, that they knew he was desirous to be a righteous man, and to do all things whereby he might please God, which was the profession of the Pharisees also. However, he desired, that if they observed him offending in any point, and going out of the right way, they would call him back and correct him. On which occasion they attested to his being entirely virtuous; with which commendation he was pleased. But still there was one of his guests there, whose name was Eleazar, a man of an ill temper, and delighting in rebellious practices. This man said, ‘Since you desire to know the truth, if you will be righteous in earnest, lay down the high priesthood, and content yourself with the civil government of the people.’ And when he desired to know for what cause he ought to lay down the high priesthood, the other replied, ‘We have heard it from old men, that your mother had been a captive under the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes.’ This story was false, and Hyrcanus was provoked against him; and all the Pharisees had a very great indignation against him. Now there was one Jonathan, a very great friend of Hyrcanus’s, but of the sect of the Sadducees, whose notions are quite against to those of the Pharisees. He told Hyrcanus that Eleazar had cast such a reproach upon him, according to the common sentiments of all the Pharisees, and that this would be made manifest if they would but ask them the question, What punishment they thought this man deserved? for that he might depend upon it, that the reproach was not laid on him with their approval, if they were for punishing him as his crime deserved. So the Pharisees made answer that he deserved stripes and bonds, but that it did not seem right to punish reproaches with death. And indeed the Pharisees even upon other occasions, are not apt to be severe in punishments. At this gentle sentence, Hyrcanus was very angry, and thought that this man reproached him by their approval. It was this Jonathan who chiefly irritated him and influenced him so far that he made him leave the party of the Pharisees and abolish the decrees they had imposed on the people, and to punish those that observed them. From this source arose the hatred which he and his sons met with from the multitude.”

One item that deserves explanation here is that when they say “captive” here they mean raped. It was common in all societies for the conquering side in a war to take the wives of their enemies captives and they were frequently raped. So Eleazar was alluding to the idea that Hyrcanus’ mother was in some way “impure” for the possibility of her having been raped as a captive and that thus Hyrcanus himself was somehow “impure.” Rabbinic “law” prohibits a woman who has been raped from being married to a priest and considers any children produced from such a union to be tainted as to being able to serve as priests.

Let’s look at another anecdote that illustrates the power of the Pharisees. After the death of this Hyrcanus we have just spoken of, his son Alexander took the government, after a struggle with his brother Aristobulus I. At the end of his life, Alexander gives instructions to his wife, Alexandra, as to how she can retain the government for herself and her sons. He primarily warns her of the power of the Pharisees. It reads in Antiquities, Book 13, chapter 15:5:399-404:

“ But when his queen saw that he was ready to die, and had no longer any hopes of surviving, she came to him weeping and lamenting and bewailed herself and her sons on the desolate condition they should be left in; and said to him, ‘ To whom do you thus leave me and my children, who are destitute of all other supports, and this when you know how much ill-will your nation bears you?’ But he gave her the following advice : That she need but follow what he would suggest to her, in order to retain the kingdom securely, with her children; that she should conceal his death from the soldiers until she should have taken that place; after this she should go in triumph, as upon a victory, to Jerusalem, and put some of her authority into the hands of the Pharisees; for that they would commend her for the honor she had done them, and would reconcile the nation to her, for he told her they had great authority among the Jews, both to do hurt to such as they hated, and to bring advantages to those towhom they were friendly disposed; for that they are believed best of all by the multitude when they speak any severe thing against others, though it be only out of envy at them.”

Here we can see another example of the fear the aristocracy had of the Pharisees. Alexandra did take power and followed her husband’s advice, as outlined in Antiquities Book 13, chapter 16:1-2:405-409:

“So Alexandra, when she had taken the fortress, acted as her husband had suggested to her, and spoke to the Pharisees, and put all things into their power, both as to the dead body, and as to the affairs of the kingdom, and thereby pacified their anger against Alexander, and made them bear goodwill and friendship to him; who then came among the multitude, and made speeches to them, and laid before them the actions of Alexander, and told them that they had lost a righteous king; and by the commendation they gave him, they brought them to grieve, and to be in heaviness for him, so that he had a funeral more splendid than had any of the kings before him. Alexander left behind him two sons, Hyrcanus and Aristobulus, but com-

mitted the kingdom to Alexandra. Now, as to these two sons, Hyrcanus was indeed unable to manage public affairs, and delighted rather in a quiet life; but the younger, Aristobulus, was an active and a bold man; as for this woman herself, Alexandra, she was loved by the multitude, because she seemed displeased at the offenses her husband had been guilty of. So she made Hyrcanus high priest, because he was the elder, but much more because he cared not to meddle with politics, and permitted the Pharisees to do everything; to whom she also ordered the multitude to be obedient. She also restored again those practices which the Pharisees had introduced, according to the traditions of their forefathers, and which her father-in-law, Hyrcanus, had abrogated. So she had indeed the name of the regent, but the Pharisees had the authority; for it was they who restored such as had been banished, and set such as were prisoners at liberty, and, in general, they differed nothing from lords.”

The death of this Alexander was pretty much the beginning of the end for the Sadducees. If Alexander had died with a strong male heir, he might have continued to oppose the Pharisees and Jewish history may have taken a different course. But, as a woman, Alexandra had to walk on eggshells in order to retain power and would have had difficulty getting men to follow her orders. So she had to take the path of least resistance, even though Josephus does describe her as being a wise and strong woman. His two sons became rivals for power, opening another window for the Pharisees to triangulate and consolidate their position.

In conclusion, there is nothing whatsoever in the writings of Josephus to indicate or insinuate, either directly or indirectly, that there was any custom of exclusive matrilineal descent, and there are many occasions where it would have been logical for him to mention it. Was it a custom among some groups of Pharisees? Maybe. Even within the three sects of Judaism that Josephus describes he makes clear that there were differences in practices and opinions. And we will see in the Talmud that there were (and are) few issues which Jews agreed on. What is also clear is that the Pharisaic customs which evolved in the Talmud were not derived from the Torah, as their modern-day counterparts, the Orthodox, claim. I find the portrait that Josephus draws of the stranglehold the Pharisees had on the masses to be an uncanny resemblance to the current struggle going on in Judaism and particularly in Israel. Many non-Orthodox Jews outside of Israel today will have Orthodox marriage ceremonies even though they don't want them simply because they're afraid that they may not be recognized in Israel and Israeli politicians won't allow non-Orthodox Rabbis to have any participation in religious life because they're afraid of retribution from the Orthodox. The Pharisaic/Orthodox tradition is based on intimidation, fear, manipulation and disingenuity