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The Jewish Festival of Sukkot in the Eyes of the Pagan Authors¹

Abstract: The pagan authors did not pay much attention to the Jewish festivals celebrated in Jerusalem. The only one we may precisely discern is the Festival of Tabernacles i.e. Sukkot. Plutarch in his *Table talks* made some interesting but incoherent remarks on it. It is certain that he has not obtained his information from personal observation and investigation but he has clearly referred to other pagan authors. His view of Sukkot reflects Sadducean tradition. His labelling of one specific Jewish feast by the name of Bacchus allows us to consider if he knew something about Essean community. Two other pagan authors, Tacitus and Menander of Laodicea, who also wrote about the Jewish festivals, do not deliver us any details concerning Sukkot as such.

Key words: Sukkot, Tabernacles, Plutarch, Jerusalem

Introduction

Within the borders of the Roman Empire the Jewish diaspora was present in almost all, even the most remote, parts of the Mediterranean, having been particularly numerous and influential in Asia Minor, Egypt and their surroundings. No wonder, that in preserved works of Greek and Roman authors, the remarks on the Jews and their customs are relatively common. Such customs as male circumcision, food restrictions or endogamy draw pagans' attention. Although, if we scrutinize our sources no Jewish religious celebration but Sabbath is

¹ The article is an revised and expanded version of paper presented at 5th International Student Conference in Antiquity and Byzantine Studies which took place in Poznań, 7—9 May 2009.

well testified². Great annual festivals celebrated in Jerusalem are almost absent in the source material. It was so probably because of the specific status of the Temple, magnificent and renown but inaccessible for the Gentiles. Hecataeus of Abdera around the end of the 4th century BC has stated briefly: “(Moses) established the temple that they hold in chief veneration, instituted their forms of worship and ritual”³. However he mentions no particular religious custom by its name.

In my research I have took into consideration every piece of the evidence from the pagan sources which could be combined with the Jewish pilgrimage festivals, even if it has very general character. Besides the Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles) two other festivals are in the question: Passover (Pesach), and Feast of Weeks (Shavuot). All three were preceded and followed by other periods of particular religious importance. It is to be said, that neither Pesach nor Shavuot are even hinted by pagans by their names or characteristic features.

The Jewish Festival of Sukkot has its well-established biblical foundation⁴. Although its origins are deeply rooted in agricultural activities of the ancient farmers (it originated probably from some kind of feast of the fruit harvest) the Sukkot reached its full development in the post-Exilic period⁵. It was celebrated in autumn, lasted seven days and comprised several rituals and customs. Two of them were the most significant: living in booths and processions with *lulav* — bunch of twigs. Deuteronomy prescribes a joyful feast not only for Jews, but also for sojourners (Septuagint translates ‘proselyte’) who live among the Jews⁶. Also Nehemia notes that there was a great rejoicing during the feast⁷. In non-canonical Book of the Jubilees Sukkot is labelled as “Feast of joy” too⁸. The most extensive source to investigate the celebration of Tabernacles in the Second Temple Period

² Examples: Agatarchides, apud: Josephus: *Contra Apionem*, I 210 (Stern 30a); Tibullus: *Carmina*, I 3, 18 (Stern 126); Horatius: *Sermones*, I 9, 69 (Stern 129); Pompeius Trogus, apud Iustinus: *Historiae Phillipcae, Libri XXXVI Epitoma*, 2, 14 (Stern 137); Ovidius: *Ars Amatoria*, I 75, 416 (Stern 141—142); Ovidius: *Remedia Amoris*, 220 (Stern 143); Seneca Senior: *De Superstitione*, apud: Augustinus: *De Civitate Dei*, VI 11 (Stern 186); Seneca Senior: *Epistulae Morales*, XCV 47 (Stern 188); Persius: *Satirae*, V 179—184 (Stern 190); Petronius: *Fragmenta*, 37 (Stern 195); Plinius Maior: *Historia Naturalis*, XXXI 24 (Stern 222); Frontinus: *Strategemata*, II 1, 17 (Stern 229); Martialis: *Epigrammata*, IV 4 (Stern 239); Plutarchus: *De Superstitione*, 3, 8 (Stern 255—256); Tacitus: *Historiae*, V 4 (Stern 281); Vettius Valens: *Anthologiae*, I 10 (Stern 338); Juvenalis: *Satirae*, VI 159 (Stern 298); Juvenalis: *Satirae*, XIV 96, 105—106 (Stern 301); Suetonius: *Divus Augustus*, 75 (Stern 303); Suetonius: *Tiberius*, 32 (Stern 305); Cassius Dio: *Historia Romana*, XXXVII 15, 4. XLIX 22, 5. LXVI 7, 2 (Stern 406, 414, 430); Porphyrius: *De Abstinencia*, IV 13 (Stern 455).

³ Hecataeus: *Aegyptiaca* apud Diodorus Siculus: *Bibliotheca historica*, XL 3, 3 (Stern 11).

⁴ Lev. xxxiii: 33ff; Num. xxix: 12ff; Deut. xvi: 13ff; Neh. viii: 13ff.

⁵ E. Auerbach: “Die Feste im Alten Israel”. *Vetus Testamentum* 1958. Vol. 8, fasc. 1, p. 14.

⁶ Deut. xvi: 13ff.

⁷ Neh. viii: 17.

⁸ Jub. xvi: 20ff.

is Mishnaic tractate of Sukka. Hakan Ulfgard, an author of the book on celebration of Tabernacles in antiquity summarizes: “The mishnaic picture of Sukkot in the Second Temple shows a popular and joyful feast, not focusing on exclusively priestly sacrificial worship, but on typical elements of such parts of celebration in which common people could participate, actively or as eager spectators”⁹.

Plutarch

There are only few pagan sources dealing with the Feast of Sukkot. First and the most important are Plutarch’s *Table Talks* in which he deliberates over the question: Who the God of the Jews is? (*Quaestiones convivales* IV 6: 2)¹⁰. *Table talks* have the structure of an informal dialogue, full of digressions. It has been written most probably at the end of the first decade of the second century CE¹¹. Plutarch writes:

πρῶτον μὲν τῆς μεγίστης καὶ τελειοτάτης ἑορτῆς παρ’ αὐτοῖς ὁ καιρὸς ἐστὶν καὶ ὁ τρόπος Διονύσω προσήκων. τὴν γὰρ λεγομένην νηστείαν <ἄγοντες> ἀκμάζοντι τρυγητῶ τραπέζας τε προτίθενται παντοδαπῆς ὀπώρας ὑπὸ σκηναῖς καὶ καλιᾶσιν ἐκ κλημάτων μάλιστα καὶ κιττοῦ διαπεπλεγμέναις καὶ τὴν προτέραν τῆς ἑορτῆς σκηνὴν ὀνομάζουσιν. ὀλίγαις δ’ ὕστερον ἡμέραις ἄλλην ἑορτὴν, οὐκ ἴ αν δι’ αἰνιγμάτων ἀλλ’ ἄντικρυς Βάκχου καλουμένην, τελοῦσιν. ἔστι δὲ καὶ κραδηφορία τις ἑορτὴ καὶ θυρσοφορία παρ’ αὐτοῖς, ἐν ἧ ὑθύρσους ἔχοντες εἰς τὸ ἱερὸν εἰσίσαισι· εἰσελθόντες δ’ ὅ τι δρῶσιν, οὐκ ἴσμεν, εἰκὸς δὲ βακχεῖαν εἶναι τὰ ποιούμενα· καὶ γὰρ σάλπιγξι μικραῖς, ὡσπερ Ἄργεῖοι τοῖς Διονυσίοις, ἀνακαλοῦμενοι τὸν θεὸν χρώνται, καὶ κιθαρίζοντες ἕτεροι προΐασιν, οὓς αὐτοὶ Λευίτας προς ὀνομάζουσιν.

The time and character of the greatest, most sacred holiday of the Jews clearly befit Dionysus. When they celebrate their so-called Fast, at the height of the vintage, they set out tables of all sorts of fruit under tents and huts plaited for the most part of vines and ivy. They call the first of the days of the feast Tabernacles. A few days later they celebrate another festival, this time identified with Bacchus not through obscure hints but plainly called by his name. There is also festival, which is a sort of ‘Procession of Branches’ or ‘Thyrus Procession’ in which they enter the temple each carrying the thyrsus. What

⁹ H. Ulfgard: *The Story of Sukkot. The Setting, Shaping and Sequel of the Biblical Feast of Tabernacles*. Tübingen 1998, p. 231.

¹⁰ I have already deliberated over the Dionysiac interpretation of the Jewish God in an article: P. Piwowarczyk: “Dionizyjska interpretacja Boga żydowskiego i jej źródła”. In: *Religie w świecie antycznym*. Eds. R. Matuszewski, P. Piwowarczyk. Poznań 2007, pp. 47–61.

¹¹ L.H. Feldman: “Jews as viewed by Plutarch”. In: Idem: *Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*. Leiden—New York—Köln 1996, p. 531.

they do after entering we do not know, but it is probable that the rite is a Bacchic revelry, for in fact they use little trumpets to invoke their god as do the Argives at the Dionysia. Others of them advance playing harps; these players are called in their language Levites¹².

Firstly, let us consider Plutarch's account more thoroughly. In the dialogue the Dionysiac argumentation is presented by the Athenian, Moiragens. Its structure is as follows:

1. Time and character of the greatest, most sacred holiday of the Jews befit Dionysus.

2. Jews celebrate their so-called fast at the height of vintage. They pitch the tents or plait huts, for the most part of ivy and vines. Under them they set out the tables of various fruits.

3. They call the first of the days of the feast "Tabernacles".

4. A few days later they celebrate another Festival. The Jew call that Festival by the name of Bacchus.

5. A sort of "Procession of Branches" or "Thyrsus procession", in which Jews enter the Temple each carrying a thyrsus, is also mentioned by Plutarch. However he does not connect it with Tabernacles. According to him the Jews probably perform some kind of Bacchic revelry inside the Temple. Some of them invoke their god using the trumpets, and others, called Levites, proceed playing citharas.

Menahem Stern juxtaposes elements of Plutarch's description with the Jewish calendar. As a result, he obtains a combination of various cultic elements connected with different autumn Jewish festivals. First of them seems to be the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), preceding the Feast of Tabernacles by four days. It is described by the term *nesteia* — the fast. The main narration is, however, focused on Sukkot. Plutarch knew about a custom of pitching the tents. The Festival called by Bacchic name is the most difficult to identify. Stern supposes that it is Shemini Atzeret, the feast, which follow the seventh day of Tabernacles. Procession of branches should be again connected with cheerful aspects of Tabernacles, music accompaniment and waving green branches¹³.

A very interesting point is, that although Plutarch describes the rituals which were performed within the Temple walls and in the inner yard, he does not mention those held out of it, such as picking willow-twigs in Mosa out of Jerusalem and bringing them into the temple, or drawing water from the Pool of Siloam¹⁴. It is worth noting, that both of these customs do not have any scriptural foundation but are testified by Mishna.

¹² Plutarch: *Quaestiones Convivales*, IV 6: 2, p. 671D—E. Trans. H.B. Hoffleit (slightly corrected). In: M. Stern: *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*. Vol. 1, no. 258, Jerusalem 1974, p. 553 (Greek original); 557 (translation).

¹³ M. Stern: *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*. Vol. 1, pp. 560—561.

¹⁴ MSukka iv: 5A, iv: 9A.

It is clear that Plutarch made many misinterpretations, featuring minor, and passing over fundamental parts of the celebration. He does not point out that women play no important role in celebrating the Tabernacles, in contrast to the Dionysiac revels¹⁵. There could be found, however, some common points with accounts of the Jewish authors. Josephus calls Tabernacles *ἑορτή μέγιστη*, precisely as Plutarch has done¹⁶. Also the term *θύρσος* is sometimes used by the Jewish writers for *lulav*. Stern points at Ant XIII, 372 and II Macc. X: 7 as examples¹⁷. It is probable, that Plutarch knew the name of Sukkot in Greek translation. Septuagint use two forms; one of them, slightly preferable, is: *ἑορτή (τῶν) σκηνῶν*, and the second: *ἑορτῆ τῆς σκηνοπηγίας*. Philo follows the former, Josephus and John the latter. For our subject it is also important that use of the term *σκηνοπηγία* was not limited to Jewish milieu. It appears also in the pagan inscription from the Isle of Kos¹⁸.

The main problem remaining to solve is identification of the Jewish festival called by the name of Bacchus. Plutarch does not hand down any details. However, we can find very useful hint in scholion to Aristophanes' *The Knights*. There, among other meanings of the term *Βάκχος*, we read as follows:

Βάκχον [...] ἐκάλουν [...] τοὺς κλάδους οὓς οἱ μύσται φέρουσι. μέμνηται δὲ Ξενοφάνης ἐν Σίλλοις οὕτως: “ἔστᾱσιν δ’ ἐλάτης <βάκχοι> πυκινὸν περὶ δῶμα”.

The branches which the initiated carry were called Bacchus. Xenophanes in Silloi mentioned: “Bacchi made of fir stood about solid house”¹⁹.

The Plutarch's second feast, plainly called by the name of Bacchus, could be then understood as some sort of “festival of branches”. What kind of branches would it be? Either *lulav* (bunch of three different plants) or *aravot* (willow twigs), both used during the Tabernacles. The seventh day of Tabernacles was even plainly called “the Day of the Willow”. Regardless of choice made between these two branches, the feast of Bacchus seems to refer to Sukkot. Plutarch or his source does not discern various customs connected with Sukkot and divides them into three separate festivals. The only problem is, that such a identification, Bacchus as a branch, is delivered only by *Scholia* with a sole reference to Xenophanes. It might seem to be hazardous to build a firm conclusion only on that.

¹⁵ L.H. Feldman: “*Jews as viewed by Plutarch*”..., p. 545.

¹⁶ Josephus: *Antiquitates*, VIII 100.

¹⁷ M. Stern: *Greek and Latin Authors*..., p. 561.

¹⁸ H. Ulfgard: *The Story of Sukkot. The Setting, Shaping and Sequel of the Biblical Feast of Tabernacles*. Tübingen 1998, p. 217.

¹⁹ *Scholia in Equites*, 408. In: *Scholia in Acharnenses, Equites, Nubes*. Ed. W.J.W. Koster. *Scholia in Aristophanem* 1.2. Groningen 1969 (digitalized edition). See also: K. Clinton: *Bakchos* (3). In: *Neue Pauly. Enzyklopädie der Antike*. Vol. 2, Eds. H. Cancik, H. Schneider. Stuttgart—Weimar 1997, p. 410.

There is also another possible solution. The new light is shed upon Plutarch's account by John C. Revees' article²⁰. On the basis of the *Book of Jubilees* and some hints derived from Qumran *Temple Scroll* and *Genesis Apocryphon* he reconstructs a sectarian Jewish feast of the first fruits of wine, parallel to those, which were held in the ancient Canaan. Originally it had been celebrated, like Sukkot, in the autumn²¹. This festival has no scriptural basis, although the Bible contains some mysterious passages referring to the joyful wine celebration, during which the Israelites were dancing and drinking heavily²². Also in the case of the festival of the first fruits of wine the special emphasis was put on the rejoicing²³. Greeks and Romans were aware of the existence of the Essene community in Qumran (or in its neighbourhood). Pliny devoted short description to the tribe of the Essenes (gens Esseni)²⁴. Also Dio Chrysostomus mentioned them independently²⁵. Any other particular Jewish religious group was distinguished by ancient writers. We may assume, with a certain probability, that also Plutarch, roughly contemporary of Pliny and Dio, knew something about the Essenes and their cultic calendar and connected it with the Bacchic celebrations.

Morton Smith is much more daring in his equation of Tabernacles with Dionysiac feast. He states: "Plutarch's source and his own judgement were right about this — the feast was certainly sacred to a wine god"²⁶. Smith surmises that after conquest of Palestine, Jews associated local wine god with their own. He even mentions his name — Eshkol, which means "wine cluster", and rates him among three Canaanite gods of Hebron²⁷. Smith's generalization seems to be going too far, but it sounds more plausible if we suppose that not the Tabernacles but the separate feast of the first fruits of wine was originally a celebration in honour of wine aspect of Jewish God, irrelevant if under the name of Eshkol or not. Very often name Βάκχος as well as Latin Bacchus was used, especially in poetry, as synonym for wine. Such a practice could be traced back to Euripides²⁸. Those examples, supported by some Dionysiac epithets, like Staphylites (στάφυλίτης) „guardian of grapes" or Protrygaius (προτρύγαιος) „presiding over the vintage"²⁹

²⁰ J.C. Revees: "The Feast of the First Fruits of Wine and the Ancient Canaanite Calendar". *Vetus Testamentum* 1992, Vol. 42, fasc. 3, pp. 350—361.

²¹ In the *Temple Scroll* it was shifted into orbit of the Feast of the Weeks, probably to distance it from the pagan background.

²² Judg. ix: 27; 1 Sam. i: 3ff.

²³ 11QT xxi: 8—9; Jub. vii: 6.

²⁴ Plinius Maior: *Historia Naturalis*, V 73.

²⁵ Dio Chrysostomus apud Synesius: *Vita Dionis*, 3.

²⁶ M. Smith: "On the Wine God in Palestine (Gen 18, John 2, and Achilles Tatius)". In: M. Smith: *Studies in Cult of Yahweh*. Vol. 1: *Studies in Historical Method, Ancient Israel, Ancient Judaism*. Leiden—New York—Köln 1996, p. 234.

²⁷ Gen. xiv: 13.

²⁸ Euripides: *Iphigenia Aulidensis*. 1061. See also: Euripides: *Bacchae*. 284.

²⁹ Both recorded by Aelian: *Varia historia*, III 41.

may lead Plutarch to equation of the Jewish wine feast (whose Greek name is not known) with Bacchus.

The most crucial point is to investigate possible Plutarch's sources. It is very improbable that he has sought information in the Jewish community in Boeotia, where he lived and was active as a priest in Delphi, despite of the Jewish presence in that area since 3rd century BC, again confirmed for 1st century AC by Philo³⁰. We know, that Sukkot was celebrated in the Jewish diaspora, at least in Alexandria. Philo mentions, that the Jews built booths and prayed in synagogues, even though he says nothing about processions or carrying lulav³¹. There is also evidence of feasting Sukkot from Edfu and Berenice in Cyrenaica³². Though he has visited both Alexandria and Rome, in his relation about the third feast the Temple is mentioned, so it may refer only to the celebration in Jerusalem. Also *lulavim* are not confirmed in case of diaspora celebrations. Despite of that Plutarch certainly has not based his account on personal observations made at Jerusalem. Lacks and discrepancies in his account make him improbable as an eye-witness. Plutarch, describing two others feasts, gives no geographical data, but he also does not state that it was his (or Moiragenes') personal observation made in some diaspora community. It is certain that he has used some indirect sources.

His account refers to the situation before 70 AD, i.e. before the destruction of the Temple. So he must have drawn from some sort of literary material. I have already noted that Plutarch had not referred to the customs which had not been corroborated by Torah. It harmonizes with the tradition of the Sadducees. So probably such a tradition is reflected in *Table talks*. Of course, it is very improbable that Plutarch has acquainted himself with the Sadducean view of Sukkot personally. It is possible that he based his account on a certain treatise entitled "On the Jews". We know about six or seven monographs on that subject written by pagan authors, unfortunately all of them are forgotten and known only by titles or at best from excerpts³³. We know also that there were some lost works on Jewish War written by pagan authors. Josephus mentions them at the very beginning of his own *Jewish War*³⁴. There is a remark, included in Minucius Felix' *Octavius*, on Antonius Julianus, author of such a work, who is probably identical with procurator of Judea since 70 AC³⁵. He, and his contemporaries, could obtain some information about

³⁰ D.M. Lewis: "The first Greek Jew". *Journal of Semitic Studies* 1957, Vol. 2, pp. 264—266; Philo: *Legatio*, 281.

³¹ Philo: *Flacc.* 116—124.

³² A. Kasher: "Synagogues as 'Houses of Prayer' and 'Holy Places' in the Jewish Communities in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt". In: *Ancient Synagogues: Historical Analysis and Archeological Discovery*. Eds. D. Urman, P.V.M. Fleisher. Leiden—New York—Köln 1998, p. 213.

³³ There were written by Apollonius Molon, Alexander Polyhistor, Teucer of Cyzicum, Damocritus, Nicarchus, Herennius Philo of Byblos and probably by Hecataeus of Abdera.

³⁴ Josephus: *BJ*, i: 1—3, 7—8.

³⁵ Minucius Felix: *Octavius*, 33, 4.

Jewish festivals, as well as about the community of Essenes (during the Jewish War also the Qumran community ceased to exist), after the Jewish War, when a lot of the Jews were captured and enslaved. Pliny and others owed their knowledge probably to those Jews. Their works were then read by compilers and antiquarians. Plutarch included some detail about wine festival in the general description of Tabernacles creating a complex but heterogeneous composition.

There is also a second fragment from Plutarch dealing with Tabernacles short passage *Sayings of Kings and Commanders*.

The Jews, when Antiochus was besieging Jerusalem, asked for an armistice of seven days for their most important festival (πρὸς τὴν μεγίστην ἑορτὴν), and he not only granted this, but he also made ready bulls with gilded horns, and a great quantity of incense and spices and brought all these in solemn procession as far as the gates³⁶.

The designation ἑορτὴ μέγιστη clearly indicates the Feast of Tabernacles. Episode recorded in *Apophthegmata* has common source with the very similar Josephus' description of the same event³⁷. Both of them use a certain Hellenistic source dealing with Antiochus Sidetes' siege of Jerusalem.

Tacitus

A very ambiguous testimony is handed down by Tacitus:

But since their priests used to chant to the accompaniment of pipes and drums and to wear garlands of ivy (*hedera vinciebantur*), and because a golden vine was found in their temple, some have thought that they were devotees of Father Liber³⁸.

Although Tacitus had a lot of opportunities to get to know about the Jewish festivals (he was one of *quindecimviri* who, among other duties, also supervised foreign cults in Rome) he was not eager to do so. His description of the Jewish celebrations is so general that it could not be precisely matched with any particular Jewish festival. All of them were celebrated with musical accompaniment. We know nothing about usage of ivy garlands by the Jews, apart from the times of An-

³⁶ Plutarchus: *Regum et Imperatorum Apophthegmata* 148E—F. Trans. F.C. Babbitt. In: M. Stern: *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*. Vol. 1, no. 260, Jerusalem 1974, pp. 563—564 (Greek original and translation).

³⁷ M. Stern: *Greek and Latin Authors...*, p. 564.

³⁸ Tacitus: *Historiae*, V 5, 5. Trans. C.H. Moore. In: M. Stern: *Greek and Latin Authors...* Vol. 2, no. 281, Jerusalem 1980, p. 19 (Latin original), pp. 26—27 (translation).

tiochus IV's persecutions, when they were forced to wear the ivy wreaths during the festival of Dionysus³⁹. Writing his relation Tacitus could have had that period in mind.

Menander of Laodicea

Last relevant fragment we owe to minor rhetorician Menander of Laodicea, who lived perhaps in 3rd century AC:

For the glory of the festival is enhanced when those who proclaim the gathering are themselves of high repute, as well as when those who assemble are very great in number or of the highest repute. An example of the last kind are those who go to Olympia, for the more renowned meet here; while the largest multitudines are to be found at the festival of the Hebrews living in Syria Palaestina, as they are gathered in very large numbers from most nations⁴⁰.

Stern states correctly that it is difficult to imagine such a kind of festival in Meander's own time, when the Temple had not existed any longer. He must have been dependent on sources from the Second Temple Period. Since he only remarks one external feature — a great number of participants — it is clear that he had used some report of pagan observer, who was in Jerusalem during one of the great pilgrimage feasts. The Jewish author would have mentioned the feast by its name.

Concluding remarks

In conclusion, it is useful to summarize remarks on the subject I was concerned with:

1. Only the Feast of Tabernacles is mentioned by its proper name, and only in one of the relevant sources.
2. Plutarch's relation depends on the pagan written sources. On the one hand he used one of the lost treatises 'On the Jews', on the other, works about the Jewish War. He uses the Jewish testimonies only indirectly through the works of the pagan authors he had read.
3. His sources are depended exclusively or at least mainly on the Sadducean view of The Temple worship.

³⁹ 2 Macc, 6: 7.

⁴⁰ Menander of Laodicea: *Epidictica*. Trans. M. Stern. In: M. Stern: *Greek and Latin Authors...* Vol. 2, no. 446, Jerusalem 1980, p. 414 (Greek original and translation).

4. Three feasts described by Plutarch may be preferably understood as related to Sukkot exclusively (apart from fast referring to Yom Kippur), which had been split into three by the pagan author who had not obtained any single piece of information at first hand.

5. Another possibility is that he might have known something about the obscure Essean feast of first fruits of wine or its Cannanite equivalent. Such a solution would make our picture of Plutarch's sources more complicated and demanding further consideration. We do not know how it would relate to Sukkot among Essenes.

6. Plutarch was not conscious that his description does not fit the actual situation. This fact supports our observation that he is not interested in the Jewish festivals for their own sake. He needs them only to confirm his presupposition of the identity of the Jewish God with Dionysus. Shortly speaking he (or his source) misrepresents the source material, combining the data derived from various works into a heterogeneous jumble.

7. Tacitus and Menander give us no details about Sukkot or any other Jewish Festival. Menander confirms only that there was a huge gathering in Jerusalem on that occasion, which is corroborated by both the Jewish and Christian sources. Tacitus probably confuses events from the 2nd century BC with those from his own times, which shows that he knew nothing about the Jewish celebrations.