

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-28556-8 - Jews and Christians: Graeco-Roman Views

Molly Whittaker

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PART I

Judaism

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Early History of the Jews

Some knowledge of Jewish history is necessary and the following brief sketch is given to put the Jews in perspective, not as they saw themselves, but as they and their history might appear, rightly or wrongly, to an outsider.

The Jews were a small and obscure Semitic people with legendary association with Egypt, which they left under the leadership of Moses, who in part at least devised their particular institutions. Jerusalem was built as their capital city and was a natural fortress. Later it became famous for its Temple. Tiny Judaea was continually harassed by its more powerful neighbours and eventually many of the inhabitants of the northern part of the land (by then a separate kingdom) were led into captivity by the Assyrians (721 BC). The Babylonians who succeeded the Assyrian empire carried out a similar deportation from the southern kingdom (597, 587). When the Persians took Babylon, some of the exiles were permitted to return (c. 538), although many remained and formed a permanent outpost of Judaism in Babylon or in Mesopotamia. Jerusalem was inhabited once more and the Temple and its worship restored.

The Persian rule lasted until 333 BC, when Alexander the Great led his forces from Macedon in Greece on a triumphant course as far as India to the east and Egypt to the southwest, absorbing and organizing the lands through which he passed into one vast empire. On his death in 323 this was partitioned among his generals, often known as the Diadochi (Successors). Egypt with Judaea fell to Ptolemy, the eastern part of the empire to Seleucus. For a time Judaea was a battleground between the rival Ptolemies and Seleucids until the decisive defeat of Ptolemy at Panion in 200 BC. When our period begins in 200 BC Judaea, under the rule of its high priest and aristocratic families often at odds among themselves, had come under the control of the Seleucids. Jewish religious institutions were respected, but in general the Seleucids pursued a policy of hellenization, trying to bring the benefits of Greek civilization to those whom they saw as backward peoples. This was

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welcome to some Jews, who hankered after the delights of the gymnasium and theatre, but repugnant to traditionalists. Judaea itself suffered from intrigues among the dominant high-priestly families and their alignments with the rival powers of the Seleucids in Syria and the Ptolemies in Egypt.

One deposed high priest, Jason, drove the Seleucids out of Jerusalem but in 169 Antiochus IV Epiphanes regained the city, plundered the Temple and desecrated it by setting up an altar to Olympian Zeus on the altar of sacrifice. This led to the Maccabean revolt in 168, started by Mattathias, a priest from Modin, and taking its name from one of his five sons, Judas, who was nicknamed Maccabaeus, perhaps meaning 'Hammer'. This dynasty is also called Hasmonaean after an ancestor of Mattathias. The Seleucids were divided among themselves, which facilitated the struggle of the rebel Maccabaeans. In fact the latter felt strong enough to send an embassy to the senate at Rome, which supported John Hyrcanus (high priest and virtual ruler 135–104) and his successors as a counterpoise against the Seleucids.

Judaea in the Roman Period

Rome now enters the scene and something must be said of its previous history. (For a more detailed account see A. R. C. Leaney, *The Jewish and Christian World 200 BC to AD 200*, vol. 7 in this series.) Traditionally the small settlement on seven hills dated its foundation to 753 BC. Legendary kings had been succeeded by a republic. This was ruled by a senate of elders, patricians (i.e. of noble birth); there was also in course of time a popular assembly. Magistrates were elected annually, the chief being the two consuls, who acted each as a check upon the other. In times of national emergency a dictator with supreme power could be appointed for a limited period. Other magistrates, in ascending order of importance, all elected for one year only, were the aediles supervising the markets, the quaestors connected with the Treasury and the praetors dealing with legal affairs. Originally these magistracies were open only to patricians. The plebeians, common folk, had after much contention obtained the right to elect plebeian tribunes, who could veto any senatorial proposals. Intermediate between patricians and plebeians were the equites (knights), originally those who were sufficiently well off to supply and maintain a horse for military service. A young Roman who wanted a public career would perform some military service and pass through the various grades of magistracies (*cursus honorum*), culminating with the consulship and an influential

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voice in the senate. It was an admirably balanced constitution for a small city-state, for the class distinctions had gradually become less rigid.

Rome however was destined to become something more. Her influence and power were extended throughout the Italian peninsula. She came into conflict with the great African city of Carthage in the third century BC and narrowly survived an invasion by Hannibal. Then came a third Punic War and the complete destruction of Carthage in 145 BC. These wars had entailed contacts with Carthage's overseas allies. Consequently Rome found herself mistress in the first place of Sicily, an island containing old Greek colonies and Carthaginian outposts in the west, then of Greece proper. So magistrates, after their year of office in Rome, could now be sent abroad for a year to govern a province in a rapidly extending empire. It was not that Rome was deliberately following a policy of imperialism. Sometimes she was attacked and after subjugating the aggressors annexed their land as a province. Parthia was becoming a threat on the Empire's eastern frontiers so, after the collapse of the Seleucid dynasty, Rome took over Asia Minor and Syria. Client kingdoms were encouraged to act as buffer states on the Empire's borders, but could be treated as hostile and annexed if they were suspected of treacherous sympathies.

Such was the position of Judaea at this time, by now a small, virtually independent kingdom which had come under Roman protection. The Pharisees, as upholders of the Law, were becoming a recognizable group over against the wealthy aristocratic families, later to be known as Sadducees. There were internal squabbles over the succession to the priesthood, which led to an appeal to Pompey in 63 BC. This great Roman general had been sent by the senate to defeat Mithridates of Pontus, which he did in 66. Mithridates' ally, Tigranes I of Armenia, had also been involved and Pompey undertook mopping-up operations in Syria. Unfortunately for the Jews, Aristobulus, favoured by Pompey, started rebellious activities during the latter's absence. Thereupon Pompey besieged and took Jerusalem and entered the Temple, probably unaware how grievously he was affronting Jewish religious sensibilities. He did not loot the Temple, but to his great surprise he found no image there.

Pompey now organized an eastern settlement in which Judaea became part of the province of Syria. The high priest was to oversee the worship of the Temple, but had no political power, which was entrusted to an aristocratic council, the Sanhedrin. Pompey himself became increasingly involved in Roman politics. He and Julius Caesar and the wealthy Crassus formed the so-called First Triumvirate

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(three-man junta) to obtain military commands for themselves and opportunities for acquiring prestige and power. This affected Judaea in that Crassus became governor of Syria in 55 BC and in preparation for an ill-fated attack on Parthia despoiled the Temple of all its treasures.

In the following Civil Wars Caesar, returning from a triumphant conquest of Gaul, overcame Pompey (murdered on landing in Egypt in 48) and the last remnants of senatorial opposition. He was preparing for an expedition against Parthia when in 44 he was murdered by Brutus and Cassius and other conspirators, who saw in him a threat to the Republic. He was avenged by the Second Triumvirate, a coalition of a politician called Lepidus, Caesar's close friend and follower Mark Antony, and Octavian, then a mere youth, Caesar's great-nephew and adopted as his heir. Brutus and Cassius were defeated and met their death at Philippi in 42. Antony then took the East as his sphere and with his mistress, the Egyptian queen Cleopatra, formed grandiose schemes of conquest. In the clash with Octavian that followed they were defeated at Actium in 31, and in 30 committed suicide.

Octavian, given the title of Augustus in 27 BC, was now in full control, for Lepidus had been forced to retire into private life. The senate and the magistrates continued their administration at home and abroad, but the Emperor had overall charge of the army and finance and undertook responsibility for the government of provinces which by their situation and internal instability might offer particular dangers. To these, which included Syria, he nominated his own governors. Octavian and his successors always regarded Egypt as their own personal domain because its corn harvest was vital for supplying the populace at Rome; therefore control of this supply was an essential element in maintaining power. A period of peace and stability followed for the world at large with the beginning of the era of the Roman Empire.

During the Civil Wars Jewish contestants for power supported opposing parties, intrigued with Parthia and dexterously changed sides as occasion arose. By 37 BC Parthia had been defeated, a campaign in which the Roman forces had received considerable help from Herod, an Idumaeen who aspired to become ruler of Judaea. He won the favour of Mark Antony and with Roman aid was able to besiege and capture Jerusalem. In this way he imposed himself as ruler, though without the support of the people in general and in the face of the antagonism of the great aristocratic families. When Antony's fortunes waned he had no scruples in abandoning him and supporting Octavian.

Herod's reign lasted from 37 to 4 BC. He enjoyed imperial favour

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and was particularly intimate with Marcus Agrippa, the son-in-law of Augustus and his most trusted lieutenant – hence the adoption of the surname Agrippa in the Herodian dynasty. Herod's private life with its domestic intrigues and murders was probably seen as typical of an oriental despot, but he presented the public image of a civilized hellenistic monarch, uninhibited by what was regarded as that odious Jewish exclusiveness. He made generous gifts to Greek cities and at home his building activities were prodigious. Besides various fortresses he rebuilt Samaria, henceforth called Sebaste (the Greek for Augusta), and Caesarea, the great coastal city which later became the Roman administrative capital. He tried to put down banditry and to ensure peace and stability. In spite of his patronage of many pagan buildings, he also tried to conciliate the Jews and to defer to their religious scruples; in particular, he rebuilt the Temple on a most magnificent scale, but counteracted this by having an eagle (emblem of the Roman army) carved over the gateway. Jewish protests led to cruel martyrdoms.

Herod's will divided his lands among three sons. Archelaus was to rule Judaea, Idumaea and Samaria, Antipas (the Herod of the Gospels) to be tetrarch of Galilee and Peraea and Philip to be tetrarch of Gaulanitis, Trachonitis, Batanaea and Pania in the north. Revolts broke out, some thoroughly nationalistic and against foreign rule of any sort, others against the hated Idumaeen dynasty. Archelaus went to Rome and appealed for Roman support. Augustus through Varus, the legate of Syria, quelled this rebellion with great severity.

Archelaus ruled for ten years, but was both incompetent and cruel. Finally complaints to the Emperor led to his banishment. His kingdom was then put in the charge of a procurator, the Emperor's personal agent, subordinate to the governor of Syria, Quirinius. The latter held a census in AD 6 (cp. Luke 2:1–5), which provoked an armed protest by Judas of Galilee, chiefly on the religious grounds that a census was offensive to God. To the government such religious scruples must have been incomprehensible; for them this was just another outburst of Jewish turbulence fostered by superstition.

Antipas reigned until AD 39. His relationship with Rome was satisfactory until 37 when his brother-in-law Agrippa I, a favourite of the new Emperor Gaius (or Caius) (37–41), was given the territory of Philip who had died in 34. Intrigues followed, Antipas was banished and in 41 Agrippa became king of Judaea, under Roman suzerainty but once more a kingdom in itself. In the meantime, from AD 6 to 41 Judaea had been governed by a series of procurators of whom the one

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best known to us was Pontius Pilate. In provinces governed by the Emperor's own nominees it was not uncommon for a man to hold office for a long period. Pilate was in Judaea from 26 to 37, when complaints of misgovernment caused his recall to Rome, where the death of Tiberius in 37 prevented his being brought to trial.

The next Emperor Gaius (37–41), a megalomaniac, in retaliation for a Jewish attack on a Greek altar in Jamnia, ordered Petronius, legate of Syria, to arrange for the Emperor's own statue to be set up in the Temple at Jerusalem. Petronius reported to Gaius that this could only be done at the cost of terrible bloodshed. Agrippa as a personal friend of Gaius added his entreaties and Gaius actually rescinded the order. His assassination in 41 prevented further outrages.

His successor Claudius (41–54), on the death of Agrippa in 44, returned Judaea to rule under Roman procurators. These ruthlessly put down 'bandits', often like Theudas (Acts 5:36ff.) religious fanatics. There are sorry tales of bribery and disregard of Jewish religious scruples, although freedom of worship had long been guaranteed to all Jews throughout the Empire. Claudius wanted good government; in 52 he sent Cumanus (procurator 48–52) into exile. Felix (52–60) was recalled to Rome under Nero (54–68) and stood trial; he was acquitted, probably because of influence in high places.

Corrupt and inefficient government finally led to the First Jewish Revolt in AD 66. Other factors were religious fanaticism and nationalistic fervour. There were also opposing factions among the Jews themselves and terrible internecine strife. Rioting and minor pogroms took place in some neighbouring cities where the Jews lived on uneasy sufferance (cp. p. 86). The Roman legate in Syria was slow to take action and was defeated when he attacked Jerusalem. Nero then appointed Vespasian, an experienced and reputable general, who with his son Titus began his successful Jewish campaign. Meanwhile Nero in 68, when assailed by Galba, committed suicide. The so-called year of the Four Emperors followed in which Galba, Otho and Vitellius quickly succeeded one another by force of arms and finally Vespasian emerged as victor; he reigned until 79 and established the Flavian dynasty.

Tacitus' sketch of Jewish history begins at this point (see p. 16) when Vespasian, departing to assume imperial power at Rome, left his elder son Titus to finish off the Jewish war. Jerusalem was taken with fearful slaughter and the Temple was looted and destroyed. From now on Jews throughout the Roman world had to pay their annual Temple tax into a fund for the maintenance of the temple of Jupiter on the Capitol at Rome. Vespasian tried to rehabilitate Judaea by

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appointing good governors, founding cities and allowing the establishment of a seminary of rabbinic learning at Jamnia. High priest, the Temple sacrificial system and the Sanhedrin – all had gone.

Under Trajan (Emperor 98–117) there was unrest and some sporadic revolts among the Jews of the Diaspora from 115–17 (see p. 12), but no real evidence for similar activity in Judaea. In Judaea however, under Hadrian (Emperor 117–38), came the Second Jewish Revolt, 132–5. Hadrian was a great traveller, a great builder and restorer of buildings. He saw himself as bringing the civilizing benefits of the Roman way of life throughout the Empire. Most of his subjects saw him in the same light and accepted gratefully, but not the Jews. They were utterly opposed to the proposed rebuilding of Jerusalem as Aelia Capitolina, the plans for which included a pagan temple. The leader of the revolt was a Messianic pretender, Bar Kokhba, and he was supported by the famous rabbi Akiba. It was a guerilla war and its length shows that Rome found it difficult to suppress the rebels. Aelia Capitolina was now built as a Roman colony, complete with circus, baths, amphitheatre, theatre, temples of Jupiter and Hadrian. Jews were rigorously excluded, except on one day in the year when they were allowed in to conduct a ritual lamentation. Judaea ceased to be a danger to Roman rule.

The Jews of the Diaspora

The foregoing has concentrated on the Jews of Judaea who, for the government, represented the Jewish nation, but the Jews of the Diaspora (Dispersion) were far more numerous. The first major dispersion of the Jews came with the Exile in 597 BC. When Jews were permitted to return to Jerusalem many preferred to remain in Babylon. These had their links with Jerusalem, the spiritual centre of the Jewish world, but otherwise were cut off. Academically Babylon became most important for Jewish scholarship and the study of the Law. The Jews there succeeded in accommodating themselves to their various rulers, even when the Jews of Judaea had perforce to support their Roman masters in the spasmodic conflicts with Parthia. Apart from this toleration of Judaism by the Babylonian authorities, we do not have sufficient evidence to assess the native viewpoint.

The extent of the Diaspora at the beginning of our era is attested by Acts 2:9–11: ‘Parthians, Medes, Elamites; inhabitants of Mesopotamia, of Judaea and Cappadocia, of Pontus and Asia [our Asia Minor], of Phrygia and Pamphylia, of Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene; visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and

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Arabs.' The contemporary Philo (p. 35) in his *Legatio ad Gajum* (*Leg. Gaj.*), 281–2, gives more detail: 'Egypt, Phoenicia and Syria, Pamphylia, Cilicia, most of Asia as far as Bithynia and remote corners of Pontus; and similarly in Europe, Thessaly, Boeotia, Macedonia, Aetolia, Attica, Argos, Corinth and most of the Peloponnese. Islands also contain colonies, e.g. Euboea, Cyprus, Crete. I say nothing about the regions beyond the Euphrates.' Nor does Philo mention Rome; perhaps he took knowledge of its Jewish community for granted. The infiltration into the Mediterranean world is impressive. Jews would also find their way into such Romanized western provinces as Gallia Narbonensis (southern France) and Spain.

In the ancient world citizenship was a jealously guarded privilege. The Greek city-states and their colonies (around the Black Sea, on the coastal fringe of Asia Minor, the Aegean islands, Sicily and southern Italy) followed a certain pattern. Each was totally independent, a law unto itself. Its citizens had political privileges and obligations dependent on its constitution, whether oligarchic or democratic. Trading communities such as Athens welcomed foreigners to keep up business links. There was even a technical term *metics* for resident aliens. These were subject to clearly defined conditions and liable to special taxes, but their own rights were safeguarded. When these cities became units in a much larger empire they lost their complete independence, being under the control of a governor, but retained their own form of municipal administration. The Jews ranked as *metics* and, as such, had their rights, the most important of which for them was their freedom of worship. In some cases these rights were infringed but, from the time of Julius Caesar, Rome by a series of enactments confirmed certain rights for all Jews (see pp. 92ff.). There is archaeological evidence for many synagogues. Paul's missionary journeys, as described in Acts, took in cities and towns where there were Jewish communities and synagogues, in some of which the Jews were quite influential (e.g. Pisidian Antioch 13:50, Iconium 14:5, Thessalonica 17:5–9, Corinth 18:12–17). One gets a general impression that the Jews were a recognized part of the community and eager to show their loyalty to Rome, even if only to get an advantage over the Christians – perhaps a prejudiced imputation.

Elsewhere, in Egypt there was constant immigration, as Judaea was so near a neighbour, particularly into the great city of Alexandria, founded by Alexander in 332 BC. Here according to the pattern usual in Greek cities the Jews were numerous enough to form a *politeuma*, a corporate body of resident aliens with their own rights. There was

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some inter-racial feeling, for Egyptian Jews helped the Roman invaders in 55 and 48 BC, but it is only in the period of Roman rule that there is evidence of positive acts of hostility. One of the five 'quarters' of the city was called Jewish and they were a privileged community by comparison with the native Egyptian population. Augustus however introduced a capitation tax to which all non-Greeks were liable, so that in this respect Jews and the despised native peasantry were on the same level. Ill-feeling seems to have arisen because some Jews tried to worm their way into the *ephebate*, an organization for the education and athletic training of Greek youths, partly to enjoy its facilities, partly to be ranked as Greek citizens and so escape payment of the capitation tax.

Matters came to a head in AD 38 when Flaccus, the prefect appointed by Tiberius in 32, fearing deposition by the new emperor Gaius, accepted Greek support in exchange for the 'surrender' of the hated Jews. Philo in his *Against Flaccus* (*Flacc.*) and *Legatio ad Gajum* (*Leg. Gaj.*) gives a detailed account of the whole affair, in which the Alexandrian mockery of Agrippa I (p. 7) who had briefly passed through the city, was followed by riots. Flaccus was persuaded to declare that the Jews were aliens, devoid of any citizen rights at all. This led to a long and bloody pogrom. Eventually Flaccus was arrested and sent to Rome and the new Emperor Claudius in 41 explicitly re-affirmed Jewish rights, while recommending to both parties a policy of 'live and let live' (p. 99). Hostilities still smouldered and in 115 for no clearly known cause the Jews staged a rebellion, primarily against the Greeks. This was completely suppressed by the Romans in 119 and for the rest of our period no more is heard.

In another notable city, Antioch, founded in Syria by Seleucus I in 330 BC, the position of the Jews was politically the same as in the parallel Greek foundation of Alexandria. By the first century AD the Jewish community there was one of the largest in the Diaspora, to be classed along with those in Alexandria and Rome. The Jews prospered and their numbers were swelled not only by immigrants but by proselytes. There was also a Christian community (Acts 11: 19ff.), whom the Greeks may have confused with the Jews. In AD 67 an apostate Jew, Antiochus, then holding a magistracy, denounced his own father and some other Jews for plotting to set fire to the city – reminiscent of the charge brought against the Christians in Rome in AD 64 (p. 147). Lynch law followed. Some Jews were forced to offer pagan sacrifices and sabbath-observance was prohibited. This last was an illegal prohibition, but the government was preoccupied with the First Jewish Revolt. In the winter