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

Molly Whittaker

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CAMBRIDGE COMMENTARIES ON  
WRITINGS OF THE JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN WORLD  
200 BC TO AD 200  
VOLUME 6

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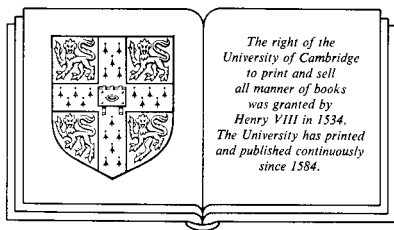
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# JEWES AND CHRISTIANS: GRAECO-ROMAN VIEWS

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## General Editors' Preface

The three general editors of the Cambridge Bible Commentary series have all, in their teaching, experienced a lack of readily usable texts of the literature which is often called pseudepigrapha but which is more accurately defined as extra-biblical or para-biblical literature. The aim of this new series is to help fill this gap.

The welcome accorded to the Cambridge Bible Commentary has encouraged the editors to follow the same pattern here, except that carefully chosen extracts from the texts, rather than complete books have normally been provided for comment. The introductory material leads naturally into the text, which itself leads into alternating sections of commentary.

Within the severe limits imposed by the size and scope of the series, each contributor will attempt to provide for the student and general reader the results of modern scholarship, but has been asked to assume no specialized theological or linguistic knowledge.

The volumes already planned cover the writings of the Jewish and Christian World from about 200 BC to AD 200 and are being edited as follows:

- 1 *Jews in the Hellenistic World* – J. R. Bartlett, Trinity College, Dublin
- 2 *The Qumran Community* – M. A. Knibb, King's College, London
- 3 *Early Rabbinic Writings* – H. Maccoby, Leo Baeck College, London
- 4 *Outside the Old Testament* – M. de Jonge, University of Leiden
- 5 *Outside the New Testament* – G. N. Stanton, King's College, London
- 6 *Jews and Christians: Graeco-Roman Views* – M. Whittaker, University of Nottingham

A seventh volume by one of the general editors, A. R. C. Leaney, *The Jewish and Christian World 200 BC to AD 200*, examines the wider historical and literary background to the period and includes tables of dates, relevant lists and maps. Although this companion volume will preface and augment the series, it may also be read as complete in itself and be used as a work of general reference.

P. R. A.    A. R. C. L.    J. W. P.

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## Author's Foreword

The aim of this volume is to give access to sources which illustrate Graeco-Roman views of Judaism and Christianity from 200 BC to AD 200. Almost all the authors quoted are pagan, a word used here and throughout the book as a convenient term to cover any religion other than Judaism and Christianity, without implying any value-judgement. The translations are my own, except for translation from the Arabic of Galen and the biblical passages which are from the New English Bible. Sometimes passages survive only in quotation by a Jewish author such as Josephus or by a later Christian writer. Occasionally Christian writers, e.g. Prudentius, have been cited to give evidence for practices which were current earlier, but for which we have no contemporary literary attestation.

Pagan references illustrating attitudes towards Judaism are of two kinds, the historical and the incidental. Tacitus prefaces his account of the siege of Jerusalem with a sketch of the origins, customs, geography and history of the Jews. This has been quoted in full. Strabo, the historian and geographer, devotes a section to the Jews and so, briefly, does Dio Cassius. These are valuable, not only for the information which they contain but also for the light they throw on the writer's view of the Jews in the context of his own period.

Rather different are historians whose works only survive in quotation. Here, information about the author who quotes them and his date and background is essential. The original author might be outdated, but the fact that he was named and quoted shows that he still carried weight and could influence the opinions of those who might read him, albeit in quotation, a century or so later. An instance is Hecataeus who, though strictly speaking before our period, was quoted at length by Diodorus Siculus and Josephus and is valuable as a counterbalance to later Alexandrian anti-Jewish propaganda. There are several accounts of the Exodus, varying in length, but all deserving reproduction because of their differences.

Equally valuable perhaps are the incidental references (here the date and background of the author are particularly important), which show how such external marks of Judaism as circumcision, sabbath-observance

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and food laws are taken for granted as being well known to the reader. Most of these are brief and best related to separate sub-sections within which they are given in chronological order. A page reference in brackets after an author's name gives a cross-reference to the page on which his biographical details are to be found.

For Christianity in its early stages literary evidence of pagan views is necessarily more scanty. The New Testament throws some light on contemporary feelings. Records and unofficial accounts of persecutions have their value. There are some incidental references to be found in pagan authors, but only towards the end of the period was there sustained anti-Christian polemic by such an author as Celsus.

The third section of this book, 'The Pagan Background', is not a collection of sources but an attempt to sketch the cults and superstitions and general climate of thought. Passages have been chosen to illustrate the practices and beliefs which would influence men's reactions to such strange and alien cults as Judaism and Christianity.

A Chronological Chart (pp. 269–72) is given to put authors in historical perspective and to list, in one column, a few outstanding persons and events of importance in the Graeco-Roman world and, in another column, those which were of particular relevance for Jews and Christians. G (Greek) and L (Latin) mark the language used, but this is not necessarily a clue to the author's nationality. Many dates are approximate, as shown by the conventional abbreviations *c.* (*circa*, 'about') and *fl.* (*floruit*, 'flourished'). Usually an author has connections with some period, or at least with some century. When even this is speculative (?) has been added.

The maps (pp. x–xiii) have the primary aim of showing authors' nationalities and the centres where they worked. Maps should also enable the reader to identify most places mentioned in the book. In the text and commentary places are usually linked with some larger and better-known areas, so it should not be too difficult to locate them. Map 1 gives the eastern regions of the Mediterranean and Map 2 gives Asia in more detail. Map 3 shows the extent and provinces of the Roman Empire in the second century AD. In the Index map references are added to place-names.

I should like to thank the three general editors, Professor Leaney, Canon Packer and Professor Ackroyd, for much detailed and constructive criticism; also the staff of CUP for their insistence on trying to achieve clarity, accuracy and consistency in the presentation of so much fragmentary material.

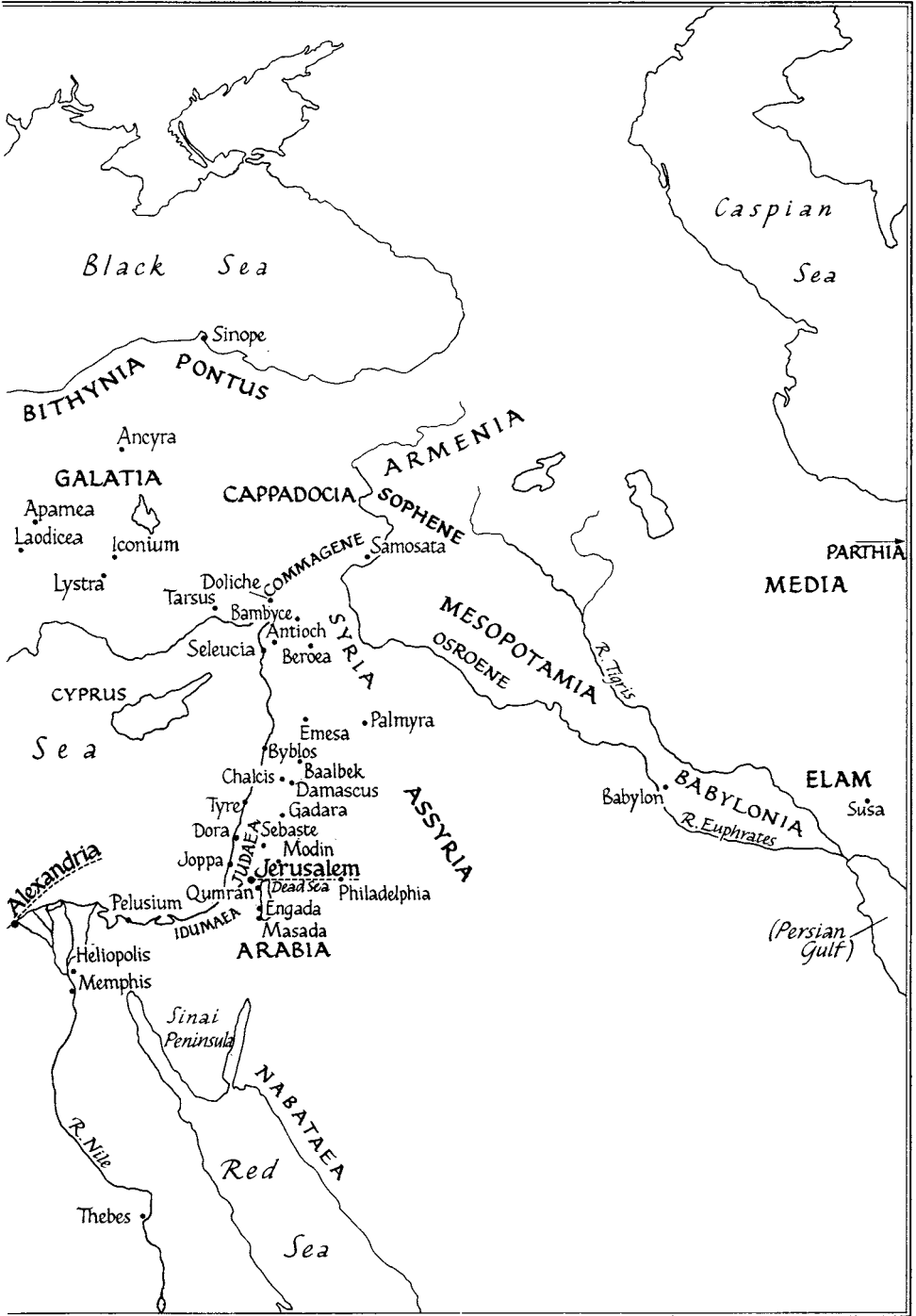


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Map 1

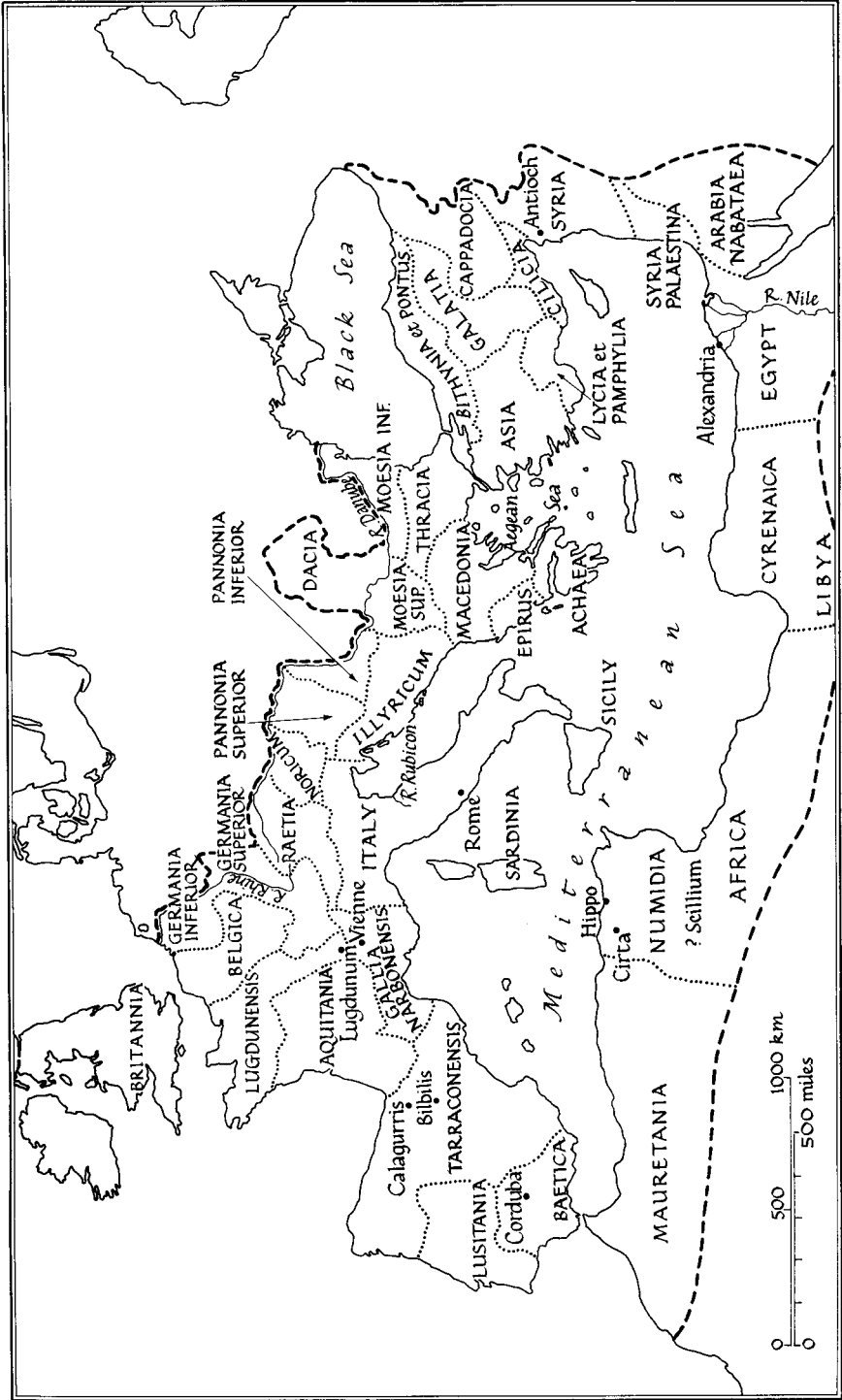
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The Diaspora



Map 2 Asia Minor



Map 3 Provinces of the Roman Empire AD 161 (Scillium was in Numidia, but its exact location is unknown)