

THE JEWS IN THE DIASPORA OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE¹

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1. Introduction

In the Roman period, that is from the time when Pompey conquered Syria and Palestine (63 BCE), a large part, perhaps more than 50%,² of the Jewish people lived in the *Diaspora*, the »dispersion« of exiled and emigrated Jews among the »gentiles«. This Diaspora consisted of an »Eastern« part, in the Babylonian and Parthian regions, and a »Western« part in the Mediterranean world. Here, for the main part, the Jews lived in the large cities where they had to come to terms with their non-Jewish fellow-citizens.³

The *aim* of this paper is to contribute to a more adequate understanding and description of this delicate situation of the Jewish Diaspora in the Hellenistic-Roman cities. How can this situation be imagined and reconstructed more precisely? How was the relationship between the Jews and the non-Jews? How was their relations to the Roman government? How was their connections with non-Jewish culture and religion? And how were the relations of the Diaspora Jews with their mother country in Palestine?

The accessible *sources* for such a description are the existing relevant inscriptions and papyri,⁴ the remaining material vestiges of the Jews in the Roman cities, esp. the synagogues,⁵ and the literary sources.⁶ The most important of the last category are Philo and

¹ Originally, this paper was presented at a Ph.D.- seminar at Sostrup Castle in 1991 on the subject *Acculturation as Reflected in the Social and Religious Life in the Cities of the Roman Empire* where it was entitled »The Jews in the Diaspora: Contact or Isolation?«. In 1993 it was published in *Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift* under the heading »Jøderne i diasporaen i romersk tid« (*RvT*, 22, 1993, 41-65).

² Thus Stern 1974, 122.

³ For a general survey on the Jewish Diaspora, see esp. Tcherikover 1959/1970, 269-377; Stern 1974, 117-183; Smallwood 1976, 120-143, 201-255, 356-525; Schürer-Vermes-Millar-Goodman (III,1) 1986, 1-176.

⁴ Cf. esp. Frey 1975; 1952; Tcherikover-Fuks 1957-1964; Lifschitz 1967; Lüderitz 1983; Horst 1991.

⁵ Cf. Gutmann 1975; 1981; Kraabel 1979b.

⁶ See esp. the literary sources mentioned in note 21. All relevant sources are listed in the works named in note 3.

Josephus to which may be added the *New Testament*,⁷ the extra-canonical Jewish and Christian literature, the *Mishnah* and a number of Greek and Roman authors.⁸

In the *history of research* on the Western Diaspora, the following questions have been at the centre of scholarly interest: 1) the civic status of the Jews in the Greco-Roman cities, 2) the relations between the Diaspora Jews and the surrounding Hellenistic-Roman culture, and 3) the relationship between the Jews in the Diaspora and the Jews in Palestine.⁹

Concerning the first question, research seems to have moved from the assumption of widespread Jewish acquisition of regular citizenship in the cities to a general rejection of this hypothesis. Instead, there has been a growing tendency to assume that, generally, in these cities, the Jews were living in an organized *politeuma* which was officially recognized with respect to internal self-government.¹⁰

Regarding the two other issues, there has been a period where the differences between the Jews of the Diaspora and the Jews in Palestine were stressed. The Jews and Judaism in the Diaspora were generally termed »Hellenistic« due both to their primary language and to the ideas which seemed to dominate in their thinking and writing.¹¹ In particular, this thesis was profiled in E.R. Goodenough's works where the idea of a characteristic *Hellenistic* Judaism, especially in Egypt, was pushed to the hypothesis of a specific »mystic« trend in the »Hellenistic« Judaism of the Diaspora.¹²

In 1969 Martin Hengel published his influential book, *Hellenismus und Judentum*, in which he emphasized the degree to which the Jews in Palestine too became »Hellenized« in the period after Alexander. Greek language and terminology, Greek art and architecture, Greek philosophy and ideas appear deeply to have influenced Judaism, both in the Diaspora and in the »land of Israel«.¹³ The impact of Hengel's work has been significant to the degree that, in the last two decades, scholars have been much less prone to think and write of a deep gulf between Palestinian and Hellenistic Judaism.

In the latest decade, however, there has been some critical reactions against Hengel's position. Scholars as Millar (1987) and Feldman (1986a) have questioned Hengel's thesis.

⁷ Esp. the *Acts of the Apostles*, despite the criticism in Kraabel 1981, which I find too sceptic.

⁸ These have been collected in Reinach 1895/1963; Stern 1974-1984.

⁹ Cf. the discussions in Juster 1914; Bell 1926; Tcherikover 1959/1970, 269-377; Applebaum 1974a; 1979; Safrai 1974; Momigliano 1975; Hengel 1976; Allon 1977; Desmond 1977; Lange 1978; Rabello 1980; Conzelmann 1981; Goldstein 1981; Urbach 1981; Kraabel 1982; Rokeah 1982; Collins 1983; Kasher 1985; Delling 1987a; 1987b; Mor 1991; Feldman 1993. A survey on earlier research is presented in Delling 1974.

¹⁰ Cf. esp. Tcherikover 1959/1970; Applebaum 1974a; 1974b; 1979; Rabello 1980; Kasher 1985.

¹¹ Thus e.g. Friedländer 1903/1906/1973; Tarn-Griffiths 1927/1952/1967, 210-238; Safrai 1974, 184; Kraabel 1982.

¹² Cf. Goodenough 1935/1969; 1940/1962, 134-160; 1953-1965/1988.

¹³ Cf. also Hengel 1989; similarly Hadas 1959/1972 and, more specifically, Lieberman 1942; 1962 on the Rabbinic literature of the *Talmud*.

Similarly, there has been some critical questioning of the idea that the Jewish Diaspora should have been »Hellenized« to the degree of »syncretism« and »paganism«. ¹⁴

Accordingly, today the scholarly task must be to refine these scholarly positions *vis-à-vis* our subject: Both the Jews in the Diaspora and the Jews in Palestine may be assumed to have been »Hellenized« to various degrees. But still the two situations must be imagined to have been clearly different. How are we then to describe the specific situation of the Jews in the Diaspora? And how may this situation be described in comparison with other groups in »dispersion«?

In what follows, I shall concentrate on the Jews, the Jewish Diaspora and the specific problems of the Jews in the cities of the Roman Empire. In the first section, very roughly, we intend to outline the history and character of the Jewish Diaspora. Then, we proceed by illustrating our issue by concentrating on a few specific cases. First, we will make a survey of the Jewish Diaspora as it may be observed in the cities of the Ionian coast of Asia Minor, of Alexandria and of Caesarea Maritima in Palestine. Secondly, we concentrate on the individual cases of Philo, Josephus and Paul. On this basis, we resume the discussion, just touched upon, in order, more generally, to address the following questions: the relationship of the Jewish Diaspora to their non-Jewish neighbours, to the Roman government and to the Jews in Palestine.

2. *The Establishment and Character of the Jewish Diaspora*

Like the Greek and the Phoenician »dispersion« (cf. below in section 9), the Jewish Diaspora had a long history. Already in the 7th and 6th century BCE, Jews emigrated to Egypt, mainly for political reasons. ¹⁵ Then followed the Babylonian Exile (586-539 BCE), and after the return to Jerusalem under King Cyrus a large Jewish colony appears to have remained in the Babylonian parts of the Persian Empire. ¹⁶

In the Hellenistic period for several reasons - esp. wars, political exile, overpopulation etc. ¹⁷ - considerable numbers of Jews left their country and settled, first in Ptolemaic Egypt and later in the Seleucid Kingdom where they were able to establish contact with the Jews in Babylonia, and where they could move as far as Asia Minor where, in Roman times, we find several Jewish communities. ¹⁸

¹⁴ Thus Momigliano 1975 and Kraabel 1982, who, however, appears to me to be too apologetic about Diaspora Judaism. To this problem, see also Sandelin 1989; Borgen 1991.

¹⁵ Cf. Schürer-Vermes-Millar-Goodman (III,1) 1986, 38-41; Kasher 1985, 1-28 (with bibliographical references).

¹⁶ Cf. Neusner 1965/1969; 1976; Stern 1974, 170-179.

¹⁷ Cf. esp. Kasher 1987.

¹⁸ Cf. Stern 1974, 143-155; Schürer-Vermes-Millar-Goodman (III,1) 1986, 17-36; Trebilco 1991.

Under the Hasmonean kings, contact was established between Jewish Palestine and Rome,¹⁹ a fact, which may contribute to the explanation of the establishment of a Jewish community in the city of Rome.²⁰ Later, in 63 BCE, when Pompey conquered Syria and Palestine, and in the following »Roman« period with its several wars and Jewish revolts against Rome, these belligerent events led to the capture of numerous Jewish prisoners of war. Generally, these were sold as slaves, and thus contributed to the growth of the Jewish Diaspora both in the Eastern and in the Western Mediterranean, including Italy and Rome.

In this way the Jewish Diaspora was established, also in the cities of the Roman Empire, and, from the time of Augustus, Jewish communities of various extent were found in most cities around the Mediterranean Sea (see map), as it appears from the existing sources.²¹

This history of the Jewish Diaspora has often been described (cf. note 3). Here, we shall not repeat these descriptions but will restrict ourselves to pointing at a few important features in this history.

We know that, in Roman times, for a number of reasons, the Jewish Diaspora grew in number and importance, but we do not know exactly the history of the Jewish community (and their numbers) in every single city of the Roman Empire.²² Neither do we know precisely the civic and juridical status of the Jews in all the cities,²³ nor do we know accurately how their relations were to their non-Jewish neighbours.²⁴

The most important feature in the Western (or Roman) Jewish Diaspora appears to me to have been its struggle for »equal civic rights« and for cultural recognition. And this struggle was, and had to be, fought against their »Greek« fellow citizens. This struggle took various forms. It could escalate and aggravate to outright revolt, as we know from the great Jewish Diaspora revolt under Trajan (115-117), when the Jews on Cyprus, in Cyrenaica, in Egypt, in Mesopotamia and, perhaps, in Palestine itself took up arms in a major war.²⁵ Normally, the Jewish struggle in the Diaspora manifested itself in political fighting for recognition of essential Jewish rights, as we know it especially from the Ionic cities, from

¹⁹ Cf. *I. Macc.* 8,1-32; 12,1-23; 14,16-24; 15,15-24.

²⁰ Cf. Leon 1960; Stern 1974, 160; Kraabel 1979a.

²¹ The following sources describe the large dispersion and the great numbers of the Jews in the Diaspora: *Acts* 2,9-11; *Aristeas* 15-38; Cicero *Pro Flacco* 28; 55; 66-69; Dio Cassius *Hist.* 59,10,6; 60,6,6; Diodorus Siculus *Hist.* 34,1-35; 40,3,8; Josephus *Bell.* 7,43, 46-53, 100-111; *Ant.* 4,114-116: 14,114; 16,59; *Orac. Sib.* 3,271; Philo *In Flaccum* 46-46, 56-57; *Legatio ad Gaium* 214-217, 245, 281-282; *De Vita Mosis* 2,27, 232; Tacitus *Hist.* 5,5; Strabo *Geogr.* 16,2,28; Suetonius *Julius* 42,3. See also note 29.

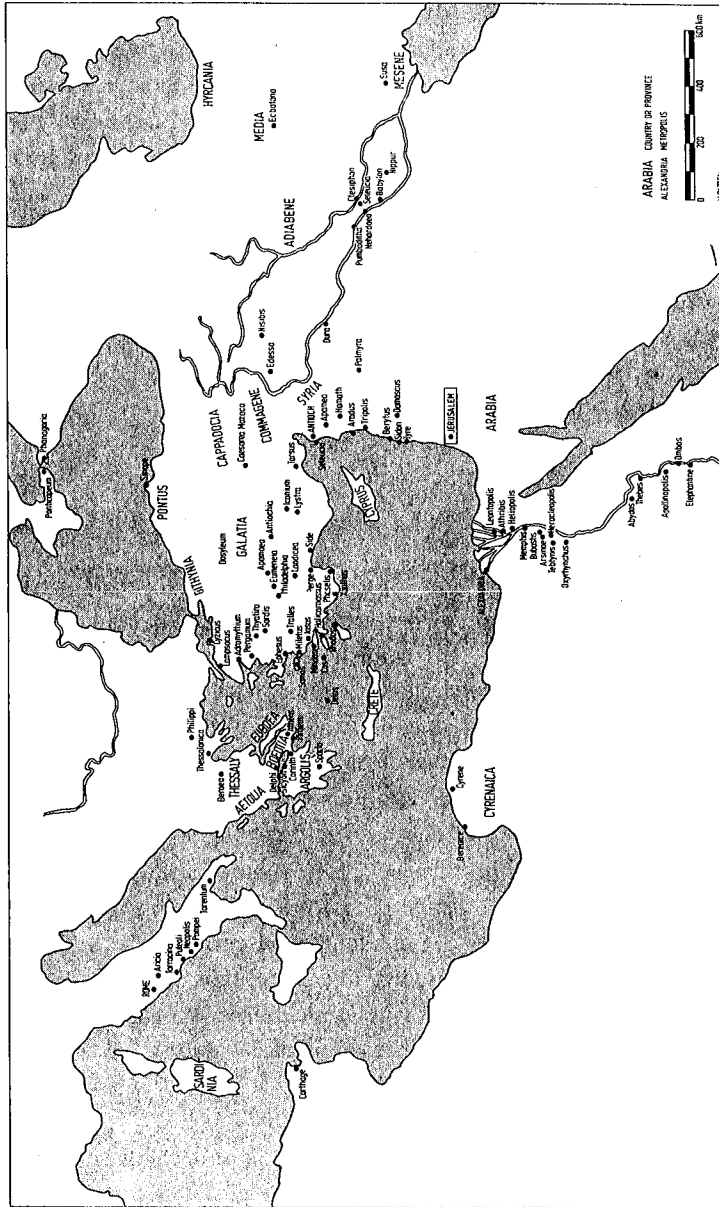
²² Concerning each individual city, see the descriptions by Stern 1974; Schürer-Vermes-Millar-Goodman (III,1) 1986, 17-86, and further Kraeling 1932 (Antiochia/Orontes); Leon 1960; Kraabel 1979a (Rome); Applebaum 1979 (Cyrene); Kasher 1985 (Egypt); Reynolds-Tannenbaum 1987 (Aphrodisias); Trebilco (Asia Minor). However, this issue cannot be explored further in this article.

²³ Cf. esp. Juster 1914; Applebaum 1974a; Rabello 1980; Rajak 1984; Schürer-Vermes-Millar-Goodman (III,1) 1986, 126-137; Lindner 1987.

²⁴ Cf. Bell 1926; Allon 1977; Conzelmann 1981; Rokeah 1982; Feldman 1993.

²⁵ Cf. Applebaum 1979; Pucci 1981.

MAP IV. THE DIASPORA. FIRST CENTURY B.C.E.



After S. Safrai, M. Stern et al. (eds.), *The Jewish People in the first Century, I*, Assen 1924, s. 120 f.

Alexandria and from Caesarea in Palestine (cf. below). Last, but not least, the Jewish struggle manifested itself spiritually and culturally in the well-known Jewish apologetic literature which we know primarily from Philo and Josephus.²⁶ A large part of the literary production of these two authors may be interpreted as attempts to present Judaism, the Jewish people and Jewish traditions, ethics, culture and religion as an advanced »philosophy« suitable to be followed also by non-Jews.²⁷

3. *The situation of the Jews in three Roman cities*

I have chosen three different examples: the Ionic cities on the West coast of Asia Minor, at the end of the 1st century BCE, Alexandria of about 40 CE, and Caesarea Maritima in Palestine in the period of the First Jewish Revolt against Rome in 66-70 CE.

The Ionic cities. According to Josephus (*Ant.* 16,27-65, cf. 12,125-126),²⁸ the situation here is that of the »classical« strife between the Jewish and the non-Jewish »Greek« inhabitants of these Ionian cities. The problem is the right of the Jews to live according to what is called »their own/traditional laws« (*Ant.* 16,27, 29, 35, 36, 41, 43ff., 59-60). These rights included their right to collect the Temple Tax and to send it safely to Jerusalem; further, their right to observe the Sabbath etc.

In the actual situation the Jews seem to have been denied some of these traditional rights. Or, put »positively«, if the Jews wanted to be full citizens, they had to take part in the common worship of the gods of the Ionian cities (*Ant.* 12,125-126). Therefore, the Jews appealed their case to Marcus Agrippa who, at the time (14 BCE), was visiting the Ionic cities where he had been met by his *philos* (»friend«) Herod the Great. In a hearing which followed in the presence of Agrippa, Nicolaus from Damascus acted as spokesman of the Jews. According to Josephus, he and King Herod succeeded in bringing the Jewish case to victory (*Ant.* 16,29-57, cf. 12,126). Agrippa confirmed »their right to continue to observe their own customs without suffering mistreatment« (*Ant.* 16,60).

Accordingly, in this case we are confronted with an element of a friendly Roman attitude to the Jews, an attitude, which, gradually, became a consistent Roman policy towards the Jewish people, a policy which secured the ethnic and religious rights of the Diaspora-Jews in the cities of the Roman Empire.²⁹

²⁶ Cf. esp. Friedländer 1903/1906/1973.

²⁷ Cf. Bilde 1988, esp. 118-122, 233-234.

²⁸ Josephus' description of the situation appears to be historically reliable, cf. e.g. Rajak 1984, 120.

²⁹ Cf. the numerous Roman decrees quoted by Josephus mainly in *Ant.* 14,185-267, 306-323; 16,162-173; 19,280-285, 287-291, 303-311. The scholarly discussion on these documents is briefly resumed in Applebaum 1974a; Moehring 1975; Saulinier 1981; Rajak 1984; Schürer-Vermes-Millar-Goodman (III,1) 1986, 126-137; Bilde 1988, 220-221. According to Rajak 1984, before Claudius, there did not exist any »Roman Charter for the Jews«. However, through a number of specific decisions and decrees of a »positive« character, gradually, there was established a tradition for a tolerant Roman attitude towards the Judaism and the Jewish people, cf. Lindner 1987.

This Roman policy continued an earlier Persian and Hellenistic tradition of respecting the right of the Jews to live according to the customs and traditions of their fathers, that is the Law of Moses, the *Torah*. This policy implied that, in continuation of the preceding Hellenistic and Persian states, the Roman government generally accepted and recognized that the Jews were obliged primarily to Jewish law. This meant that, in a number of cases - when major Roman military, political and economic interests were not at stake³⁰ - Jewish law took precedence over Greek and Roman law, especially the laws of the sabbath, of diet, of pilgrimage and of paying the Temple Tax.

Alexandria: The Jewish Diaspora in Alexandria seems to have grown in the Hellenistic and Roman periods to the extent that, in 38 CE, according to Philo (*In Flaccum* 55), the Jews inhabited about 2/5 of the city. Apparently, already for a long time, they had possessed the privilege to live »according to the traditions of their fathers«. The Jews in Alexandria seems to have constituted precisely this sort of semi-autonomous body which, in the sources, is termed a *politeuma*, that is, a recognized constitution of their own with internal self-government.

However, at this particular time, either (some of?) the Jews of Alexandria appear to have aspired further in the direction of acquiring, in addition to their actual status, equal civic rights as ordinary citizens of the Greek *polis* of Alexandria, or the Greek inhabitants of the city of Alexandria seem to have endeavored against the actual status of the Jewish inhabitants of Alexandria aiming at reducing this status and redefining it as that of »foreigners« (*xenoi*) in the city (cf. *In Flaccum* 54).

In any case, after Gaius Caligula's accession to the throne (in 37 CE), during the summer of 38, this conflict exploded in a major clash, a sort of civil war developing into a Greek persecution of the Jews, because the Greeks had obtained the support of Flaccus, the Roman Prefect in Alexandria.³¹ This persecution lasted a few months and it was probably only stopped when Caligula had Flaccus arrested and sent Pollio to Alexandria as his successor, presumably in September-October 38 (cf. *In Flaccum* 108-115). After Caligula's death in January 41 the conflict appears to have broken out again, and it seems only to have been settled in October 41 by Emperor Claudius in his famous letter to the Alexandrians. Here, the Greeks were ordered to stop their »war against the Jews«, and the Jews were admonished »not to aim at more than they have previously had«, and not to aspire at the privileges possessed by the »Greek« citizens of Alexandria.³²

³⁰ In cases where Roman political interests could be threatened, of course, Roman law took precedence over Jewish law, cf. *Ant.* 16,60: »...provided, of course, that it did not cause the Roman government any trouble«.

³¹ Cf. the detailed descriptions of this conflict in Philo *In Flaccum* (25-101) and *Legatio ad Gaium* (120-137) with the commentaries of Bell 1924/1972/1976; Tcherikover 1959/1970; Smallwood 1961; 1976; Stern 1974; Kasher 1985.

³² See text and commentaries in Bell 1924/1972/1976, 1-37; Tcherikover-Fuks 1957-1964, II, 1960, 36-55.

Caesarea: In the »Greek« city of Caesarea Maritima in Palestine, too, do we find this type of conflict between Jews and non-Jews about the political power in the city.³³ From Josephus (*Bell.* 2,260-261), we get the impression that this conflict lasted for several years, and that, about the year 60 CE, it was presented to Nero for a final decision (cf. *Bell.* 2,270, 284). The Emperor's decision was made, and made public early in the year 66, and it favoured the non-Jews in a way reminding us of Claudius' decision in October 41 of the Jewish-Greek conflict in Alexandria. Once more, Jewish claims, perhaps to full citizenship in Caesarea, perhaps even to more than that, had been turned down.

However, the imperial decision did not bring the conflict to a stand, on the contrary. It caused new eruptions in the civil strife of Caesarea, eruptions which spread to Jerusalem, and which became so violent that, according to Josephus, they were one of the main causes which triggered of the Jewish revolt during spring-time and summer 66.³⁴

These three cases demonstrate three different versions of basically the same conflict between »Greeks« and Jews on the status, »rights« and power of each group in the Greco-Roman cities.

4. Three individual cases: Philo, Josephus and Paul

These three personalities are the best known examples of individual members of the Jewish Diaspora in the Roman Empire. Let us, therefore, proceed by asking the following question: What can these cases tell us about the relationship between the Jews and the non-Jews in the Roman cities?

Philo. Philo (ca. 20 BCE to ca. 45 CE) is the foremost representative of the Jewish Diaspora.³⁵ He belonged to the most wealthy family in Alexandria; he went through the best Jewish and »Greek« education; he wrote a great number of important works on Jewish matters; these works are marked by a clear Jewish ethnical and religious commitment but, at the same time, both in form and content, they are deeply coloured by a Hellenistic, especially a Platonic, but often also a Stoic spirit; finally, Philo played a major role in the political life of the Jewish community in Alexandria, as he was the leading member of the Jewish embassy which, after the persecution in July-September 38, along with a similar »Greek« embassy, was sent to Caligula in Rome in order to present the Jewish cause.³⁶

An important aim of the literary activity of Philo was apologetically to present Judaism to non-Jews. So, we may assume that this activity was logically prolonged in his political activities which we know best from his intervention precisely in the Jewish-Greek conflict

³³ Cf. Josephus *Bell.* 2,266-270, 284-292; *Ant.* 20,173-178, and the analysis in Levine 1975.

³⁴ Cf. *Bell.* 2,284, and Bilde 1979.

³⁵ For an introduction to Philo, see Goodenough 1940/1962; Sandmel 1979; Borgen 1984; 1987.

³⁶ Cf. Josephus' interesting description of Philo in *Ant.* 18,259-260, and the descriptions in Goodenough 1938/1967 and the works mentioned in note 35.

in Alexandria in 38-41, and which he himself has described in the tractate *Legatio ad Gaium*.

Thus, Philo may be regarded as a representative of the Jewish Diaspora who was, on the one hand, deeply Hellenized, and, on the other hand, strongly conscious of and committed to Judaism, understood ethnically, culturally as well as religiously. Philo was a member of the Jewish Diaspora who was fighting for the Jewish cause in a literary as well as in a political way.

Josephus. Josephus was born in Palestine where he lived from 37 to 71 when, after the Jewish defeat in 70, he himself became a Jewish emigrant who went in a sort of exile in Rome where he spent the rest of his life (until the 90s) writing his books.³⁷

According to his own description, after his defeat by Vespasian in Jotapata in Galilee in July 67, after his release from Roman prison in Caesarea in 68, and after the fall of Jerusalem in August 70, Josephus intervened in person with Titus and Vespasian in order to relieve and soften the difficult conditions of the defeated Jews.

Further, the works of Josephus may well be understood as an expression of political apologetics for the Jewish people. Especially in *The Jewish War*, but also in the other works, Josephus makes an attempt to apologize and explain away the deplorable fact that the Jewish people actually went to war with Rome in 66-70. Josephus' works too are Hellenized in language and, to some extent, also in content, though clearly less than Philo's. And, in essence, Josephus' writings are much more influenced by the »salvation historical« ideas of the Old Testament than by Greek philosophy and religion.³⁸

Finally, the works of Josephus seem to contain a »philosophical« or a religious strand which may be characterized as that of propagating the Jewish faith as an important spiritual possibility of choice for the non-Jews in the Roman Empire.³⁹ And in this respect, Josephus resembles both Philo of Alexandria and other Hellenistic Jewish writers such as Paul.

Paul. Paul (ca. 10-65 CE) was a Diaspora Jew from Tarsus in the Roman province of Cilicia in Asia Minor who, according to *The Acts of the Apostles* (16,3; 22,25; 23,27), was a Roman citizen. Paul is an example of the spiritually mobile »Hellenistic« person who became converted from a traditional religion to a »new« one.⁴⁰ Further, Paul is an example of the »wandering« Hellenistic-Roman »missionary« who kept travelling around the Roman Empire in the service of a religious cause.⁴¹

These characteristics imply that Paul cannot be regarded as a typical representative of the Jewish Diaspora. He is, however, an example of the fact that religious change did not always go from non-Jews to Judaism. He demonstrates that, in the Roman period - despite the fact that, in a number of cases, Jews became more or less deeply Hellenized - Judaism

³⁷ Cf. Cohen 1979; Rajak 1983; Bilde 1988.

³⁸ Cf. Attridge 1976; Bilde 1988, 173-182.

³⁹ Cf. Bilde 1988, 182-191.

⁴⁰ Cf. Nock 1933; Segal 1990; Maccoby 1991; Sanders 1991.

⁴¹ As the Cynic philosophers, as Apollonius of Tyana and as the travelling priests of Atargatis/Dea Syria, cf. Bilde 1990.

was also a *traditional* religion, »philosophy« or »way of life«, as were the traditional Greek, Roman and other religions in the Roman Empire. This means that Paul testifies to the important fact, that, in the Hellenistic-Roman civilization, *all* traditional religions were in danger of being rejected by »rootless« individuals who looked for new and more »satisfactory« spiritual »models« to follow. Moreover, Paul is a witness to the fact that, in the Diaspora, Judaism - as several other contemporary »Oriental« religions - was a proselytizing and missionizing religion.⁴²

Finally, Paul is an example of the syncretistic tendencies in the Roman period, that is the dynamic spiritual movements of ideas in and out of the existing religions, movements which led to a number of creative religious and cultural *transformations*, first and foremost Christianity and Gnosticism. Paul's example demonstrates that the Jews in the Roman Diaspora constituted an important dynamo in the spiritual process of transforming old religions into new ones which went on in the »Hellenistic« Roman Empire.⁴³

5. Relations to the non-Jews and the non-Jewish world

Having presented some of the sources it seems obvious that, both in the Hellenistic-Roman cities and in Palestine, the relationship between Jews and non-Jews was strained. In the Roman period we hear constantly of conflicts of different types from intellectual »debates« over political combats to violent fighting and outright war. Consequently, a first answer to the question regarding the relationship between Jews and the non-Jews in the Diaspora has to be, that there was plenty of contact, although this »contact« was more violent than peaceful.

However, this conflict between the Jews in the Diaspora and their »Greek« fellow-citizens did not only »produce« competition, fighting and war. As it was the case in Israel of the Old Testament, it also produced ideology: religion, theology and literature. The *Septuagint* and the works of Philo and Josephus as well as great parts of the other remaining »Hellenistic« Jewish literature,⁴⁴ and the *New Testament* cannot be properly understood outside this »dialectic« context. This struggle »produced« an apologetic Jewish literature which is in itself important, and without which much Christian literature cannot be adequately understood. And it also produced that very »heretical« Jewish literature which later became the Christian corpus. Finally, this conflict between the Jews and the non-Jews produced a great part of the Jewish theology of that period. Thereby I mean the actual *reinterpretation* of Jewish religious tradition which we find in the Jewish writings of the period in question. This reinterpretation took colour after that context of hostility in which it was produced. In other words, the specific theology of Judaism in the Hellenistic and Roman

⁴² Cf. Hengel 1969/1973, 480ff., 545f., 562; Stern 1974, 117ff.; Schürer-Vermes-Millar-Goodman (III,1) 1986, 25-26; Feldman 1950; 1989; 1992a; 1992b; Sandelin 1989, against Kraabel 1981; 1982; Cohen 1987, 57; 1989; McKnight 1991.

⁴³ On this process, see Martin 1987; Bilde 1990.

⁴⁴ Cf. Holladay 1983; Stone 1984; Schürer-Vermes-Millar-Goodman (III,1-2) 1986.

periods was coloured and shaped by the conflicts between the Jews and the non-Jews from Antiochus IV Epiphanes to Hadrian.

But there were other types of contact than this hostile one. For, as already mentioned, the Jews could not avoid being influenced also more directly by the social and cultural context in which they were living. There can be no doubt that the Jews - both in Palestine and in the Diaspora - were also directly influenced by Hellenistic-Roman culture. In the period from Alexander to Constantine, Greek language and terminology, Greek art and architecture, Greek philosophy and ideas influenced Judaism to a remarkable degree. Scholars such as Goodenough, Lieberman and Hengel⁴⁵ have demonstrated to which extent even the (Jewish) way of thinking of God and of man's relations to God were »Hellenized« in this period. Josephus, Philo and Paul are conspicuous examples of this phenomenon.

But, as we have already noted, the influence worked also the other way round. In the Roman period Judaism too was influential. Many individuals were attracted by the Jewish ideas of God, by its monotheism and paradoxical universalism, by its ethics and by its culture (cf. note 42). The most remarkable example of this Jewish proselytization was the conversion to Judaism of the royal house of Adiabene in in middle of the first century CE.⁴⁶

However, not only individuals, but also collectives and »institutions« became influenced by Judaism. It has been suggested that some Roman literature was influenced by Judaism.⁴⁷ And it is a fact that Hellenistic-Roman magic has been clearly imprinted by Jewish terminology and ideas.⁴⁸ Most obvious, however, is the fact that Judaism was the major creative force by the formation of totally new religions, especially Christianity and Gnosticism.

6. »Anti-Semitism« in the Roman World?

The expression »anti-Semitism« is anachronistic in this context. In the Roman period there is no trace of the attitude of the 19th and 20th century where the rejection of the Jews as second class human beings has been based on racial theories.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Similarly Sandelin 1989; Borgen 1991.

⁴⁶ Cf. Josephus *Ant.* 20,17-96, and Neusner 1964.

⁴⁷ Cf. Hadas 1959/1972, 238-263.

⁴⁸ Cf. Schwartz 1981; Luck 1985; Kee 1988.

⁴⁹ Thus also Kraabel 1982, 458 n. 51; Cohen 1987, 46-49 against scholars as Tarn-Griffiths 1927/1952/1966, 218; Bell 1941; Baron 1937/1952/1966, I, 194; Tcherikover 1959/1970, 358-376; Sevensster 1975; Gager 1983; Feldman 1986b, and many others.

On the other hand, in the Roman world ideas were circulating about the Jews which were as strange as the modern racial theories, ideas which obviously classified the Jews as a special breed, a nation different from and hostile to other nations.⁵⁰

Further, during the riots in Alexandria in 38, the tragic situation of the Jews, as described by Philo, may well be, and has in fact been, compared with that of modern pogroms and *ghettos*.⁵¹

However, these acts of hatred were mutual. Under the Hasmoneans and during the revolt in 66-70, the Jews in Palestine appear to have committed »crimes« of a similar character, be it forced conversion to Judaism (of the Idumeans and the Itureans) or be it other kinds of persecution.

The core of the issue appears to be that the conflict between Jews and non-Jews in our period was just ferocious, very much like the modern conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. And the attitudes to the »other« part seem to have been so hostile that a comparison with later »religious« and »racial« attitudes of non-Jews to Jews, and of Jews to non-Jews appear to be quite reasonable. Accordingly, although it cannot be recommended uncritically to make use of the modern expression »anti-Semitism« - which belongs to a well-defined recent European context - the feelings and attitudes lying behind that expression may well be compared with the strong anti-Jewish feelings in the Roman world, mentioned above.

7. The relationship to the Roman government

The relations between the Jewish Diaspora and the Roman government are puzzling and indeed difficult to grasp.

On the one hand, as we know, it was marked by conflict, revolt and outright war. And, as we have seen, this was the case both in Palestine and in the Diaspora.

On the other hand, the »normal« attitude of the Jews to the Roman state was not conflict, but cooperation, as we have seen in the case of the situation in the »Ionian cities«. The evidence testify to the ability of the Jews - in spite of their insurrections and revolts - to make the ruling political power their political ally.⁵² We can follow this feature back to the Seleucid, the Ptolemaic and the Persian rulers. And it appears to be clear in Roman times, too. It began with the Hasmoneans; it continued with Hyrcanus II and Antipater, the founder of the Herodian dynasty from Idumea. Herod the Great kept his alliance with the Romans all his life through, and, as we have seen, he could also use it to the benefit of the Jews in the Diaspora. His sons and grandsons continued this policy to the best of their

⁵⁰ See esp. Josephus in *Contra Apionem* 1,69-2,150 (where Josephus is quoting and refuting a number of ancient writers such as Manetho and Apion, who had been criticizing the Jews and Judaism), but also Tacitus *Hist.* 5,1-5(13), and others, cf. Sherwin-White 1967; Sevenster 1975; Balsdon 1979; Conzelmann 1981; Gager 1983; Feldman 1986b.

⁵¹ See, for example, Bell 1926, 19-20; 1941; Applebaum 1979, 251. The same was the case during the initial phases of the Jewish revolt in 66-70 when, in many Greek cities in Palestine and Syria, there were anti-Jewish riots of a similar character.

⁵² Cf., for example, Bell 1924, 11; Cohen 1987, 27-59, esp. 34.

ability. It was interrupted during the Jewish revolt of 66-70, but after the war this policy was resumed both by Josephus and by Yohannan ben Zakkai, the founder of the »Rabbinic« academy in Jamnia, near Joppe. And after the defeat of Bar Kochba in 135 CE the Rabbinic leaders with Jehudah *ha-Nasi* (the founder of the *Misnah*) as their leader returned to this policy to the benefit of the Jews both in Palestine and in the Diaspora. By about 200 CE, the so-called Jewish »patriarchate« was founded. It represented the Jews *vis-à-vis* the Roman government, and it succeeded in maintaining positive relations between the two until it was abolished about the year 415.⁵³

This »normal« situation comes to word most clearly in the official Roman recognition of Judaism as an accepted »ethnic religion«, *id est*, the Roman recognition of the Jews' right to live »according to the laws of their fathers«. Practically, this meant Roman recognition of the Sabbath, the Jewish dietary laws, their right to collect the Temple Tax and to transfer it to Jerusalem. Further, it meant that the Jews were exempted from military service, from participation in the Emperor worship, from meeting at court on the Sabbath etc.⁵⁴

This Roman policy towards Judaism and the Jewish people was codified in a great number of official documents, as we know them from Josephus and the letter of Claudius from the year 41 (cf. note 29 above).

This situation, however, appears to be very strange. How could Rome maintain such a positive policy towards an *ethnos* who, more than once, started civil strife and outright revolt? And how could the Jews do such things against a government maintaining this friendly policy over against the Jewish people?

I have no completely satisfactory answer to these essential questions. But I think that part of the answer may be found in the following reflections.

Firstly, a »power-political« consideration: In the 1st century CE, in the Eastern Mediterranean countries, Rome and the Jews found each other in a sort of »tactical« political alliance. Rome aimed at conquering the remaining »Hellenistic« states, and the Jews aimed at »autonomy« at the cost of the same kingdoms. Consequently these two parts created an alliance against their common enemy. And later, when the Jewish Hasmonean »autonomy« broke down (in 63 BCE), the Jews had to accept the »second best solution« which was an alliance with Rome against their non-Jewish rivals and enemies both in the ethnically mixed Palestine and in the Hellenistic-Roman cities. This policy did not work well in Palestine! But in the Roman cities it worked better because Rome needed the Jews as a sort of counter-balance against the Greek populations who aspired at a reestablishment of autonomous »Hellenistic« states.⁵⁵ Accordingly, it may be maintained that the political attitudes of the Jews in the Hellenistic and Roman periods can only be properly grasped when interpreted in the context of a power-play between Rome, the »Greeks« in the city states and the Jewish people.

Secondly, as already mentioned, it is possible to point to a traditional governmental policy towards religious ethnic groups. From the time of the Persians over Alexander and

⁵³ Cf. Smallwood 1976, 476. See, however, also Stemberger 1979.

⁵⁴ Cf. the description in Smallwood 1965; 1976, 120-143 etc.; Applebaum 1974a.

⁵⁵ This power-play has been often been described, cf., for example, Tcherikover 1959/1970, 269-332; Smallwood 1965, esp. 237; 1976; Gager 1983, 43-54; Kasher 1985, esp. 357.

the Hellenistic states, it had been a well established tradition to accept and recognize the religion of such *ethnoi* like the Jewish one, and not to interfere in its internal affairs, as long as it paid its taxes and did not disturb the »peace« and »order« of the state (cf. *Ant.* 16,60). *Vis-à-vis* the Jews, it can be argued that Rome just continued this tradition. However, it is important to notice, that this policy applied to the Jews as an ethnic group, and not to Judaism as a proselytizing religion. Therefore, at the same time as Rome protected the Jews, in a number of cases, she prohibited Jewish proselytizing.⁵⁶

Thirdly, the Jews gladly accepted this policy - as long as it worked, and as long as they saw it to be profitable. When it came to exceptions, as in the cases of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, Gaius Caligula and Hadrian, the Jews had to react in order to defend themselves and their traditional right to live »according to the traditions of their fathers«.

Fourthly, there was the factor which we are used to call *Jewish Messianism*. And - as it was the case in the 17th century with the Messianic pretender Sabbatai Zvi, and as it appears to be the case in Israel today - Jewish Messianism seems to be an incalculable and »disturbing« factor in the world of »normal« political communication. In times of persecution and distress, this factor gives the Jews the strength to react and vigorously to defend themselves. And the same factor sometimes »disturbed« the mind of some Jews leading them to think that the »chosen people« was predestined to rule the gentiles. In such cases, Jewish Messianism could lead to Jewish expansionism as in the period of the Hasmonean Kingdom, in 66-67, and, perhaps, during the other Jewish revolts in 115-117 and 132-135.

8. *The Jews in the Diaspora and the Jews in Palestine*⁵⁷

What has been developed so far points in the direction of the conclusion that the similarities between the two situations in the Diaspora and in Palestine outweigh the differences. Not only the Jews in the Diaspora, but also their co-religionists in Palestine appear to have been Hellenized, that is, deeply influenced by the Greco-Roman cosmopolitan Mediterranean urban civilization. And if a counter-movement can be observed in recent research (cf. above in section 1), it may perhaps be maintained that it was not only in Palestine but also in the Diaspora, that the supposed »Hellenization« was, in fact, less thorough and more superficial.⁵⁸

Politically, moreover, I find it difficult to observe any significant difference between these two camps. The relations of the Jews both to the Roman government and to their non-Jewish neighbours appear to have been marked by similar features of strain and tension. And the attitude of the Jews is basically the same. Militancy did not appear to be

⁵⁶ Cf. Smallwood 1956a; 1956b; 1976, 201-219.

⁵⁷ Cf. the contributions in Mor (ed.) 1991.

⁵⁸ The tendency to minimize the depth of »Hellenization« in Jewish Palestine, which appears in Millar 1987; Feldman 1986a (cf. Kuhrt, Sherwin-White (eds.) 1987; Bilde, Engberg-Pedersen, Hannestad, Zahle (eds.) 1990), seems to be followed by a similar tendency to minimize the extent of »Hellenization« in the Jewish Diaspora, esp. in Josephus (cf. Bilde 1988, 173-206) and in Philo (cf. Borgen 1987).

much stronger in Palestine than abroad, and a »quietistic« line of policy did appear in both places.

This leads to the hypothesis, that also the religion and the theology of the Jews seems to have been basically of the same character in Palestine and in the Diaspora. Eschatology and Messianism do not appear to have been much weaker in the Diaspora. Although, on the surface of their writings, Philo and Josephus are more diplomatic, deeper down they share the attitudes of the Jews in Palestine.⁵⁹

This theory may be supported by the recognition that there existed very lively communications between these two parts of the Jewish world. People, ideas and money went in a constant stream from the Diaspora to Jerusalem, and Jews from Palestine often travelled abroad, especially to Rome. Our case-persons, Philo, Josephus and Paul, are good examples of this situation. More specifically, finally, this traffic is evidenced in the letter of Claudius from 41.⁶⁰

However, this does not mean that there were no significant differences between Palestine and the Diaspora.

Of course, the absence of the Temple in the Diaspora caused the cultic, ritual and religious life to be different.

Further, although there were many non-Jews in Palestine, they were definitely more numerous and powerful in the Diaspora. And this fact produced a different daily-life-situation.

The absence of the Temple in the Diaspora led to a more spiritual kind of ritual, religion and theology. And the overweight of the non-Jews forced the Diaspora Jews, much more than their brothers in Palestine, to produce an apologetic Jewish literature in which Judaism was presented as competing with other »religions« and »philosophies«.

Therefore, despite the basic and significant similarities between the Jews in the Diaspora and the Jews in Palestine, each still had its own profile caused by the specific conditions in two different situations.

9. *The Jewish Diaspora and the other »dispersions«*

The Jewish Diaspora was far from being the only one in the Roman Empire. As already noted, in the 1st century CE there existed even a Roman »dispersion«, apart from the old and well-known »dispersions« of the Greeks, the Phoenicians, the Syrians, the Egyptians, and many others.⁶¹

The causes behind these »dispersions« were partly identical and partly different. The following factors played a varying role in all of them: wars, slavery, political and religious exile, trade and emigration because of overpopulation. But overpopulation and trade were

⁵⁹ Cf. Bilde 1988; Borgen 1987; 1991.

⁶⁰ See also Josephus *Bell.* 7,409-453.

⁶¹ Cf. Teherikover 1959/1970, 298-301; Rajak 1984, 108; Schürer-Vermes-Millar-Goodman (III,1) 1986, 107-125.

more important factors for the creation of the non-Jewish »dispersions«, whereas war, slavery and exile were more significant for the growth of the Jewish Diaspora.

These reasons for leaving one's country led to the gradual creation of ethnic colonies in foreign countries. Again there are important differences between the Jewish and the non-Jewish colonies. The Phoenicians and the Greeks often created politically autonomous daughter-cities whereas, generally, the Egyptians, the Syrians, the Romans and the Jews created colonies of »foreign dwellers« (*metoikoi*, *katoikoi*) in already existing cities.

This was the reason why temples and other »institutions« of many different peoples could be found in most of the larger cities in the Roman Empire.

In all these cases, the situation of such »foreign« groups were marked by the same basic structure. They constituted a group of emigrants in a foreign country or city; they had their roots and their relatives in their own country; for these and other reasons they stuck together and kept to their fellow-countrymen with whom they tried to keep alive their own language, religion and traditions, that is, their culture and identity. In the foreign context they worked to obtain the recognition as a *synodos*, a *katoikia*, a *synagogè*, a *collegium*, that is a national community which, perhaps organized as a *politeuma*, could acquire the right to live »according to their native traditions«.

So, in many respects, the Jewish Diaspora (colonies) did resemble those of other ethnic groups. Like these, the first object of a Jewish colony was to obtain the recognition as an ethnic community with the rights to live according to their »native traditions«.

Further, the Jewish Diaspora did resemble the other ones in the respect that, in the large Hellenistic-Roman cities, it came quickly to some sort of »exchange« between the foreign colony and its hostal city. In the labile and »cosmopolitan« situation of the Hellenistic-Roman civilization usually it came to movements in and out of the »foreign colonies«. This meant that these also became a sort of »proselytizing religions« from which a »Paul« could move out as easily as others could move in.

However, these similarities between the Jewish Diaspora and the other »dispersions« did not imply that there were no differences between them. I think that the following differences did exist and were important.

Firstly, in their Diaspora, the Jews never succeeded in establishing autonomous and sovereign »daughter-states« like the Greek and Phoenician ones. And probably, they never succeeded either in obtaining collectively fully equal civic rights in the sense of genuine citizenship in their host cities.

Secondly, Judaism was *exclusive* in the sense that the worship of Jahveh excluded worship of other deities - a feature which was not found in other ethnic groups or religions.⁶² And, as is well known, this exclusiveness did also mark the Jews off in other respects such as their diet, their marriage customs etc. I think that it is this same idea that manifested itself also in the crucial Jewish idea of the election (and predilection) of the Jewish people. Alone of all the peoples on the earth did Jahveh choose the Jews and made his covenant with them. Therefore, the Jews made (and make) the fundamental distinction between themselves and all the »gentiles« whose place in the salvation history of the one and universal god is of a secondary character.

It is possible to point also to other factors representing differences between the Jewish and other »dispersions«. But those mentioned are the most important being able to explain the other characteristics of the Jewish Diaspora, primarily its inner coherence and stability.

⁶² Cf. Sandelin 1989, 27-28.

10. Conclusions

In the cities of the Roman Empire, the situation of the Jews appears not to have been very much different from that of the Jewish Diaspora in the present world, especially in the US, France, Britain and Russia. In all these countries, the Jews are forced to live among the non-Jews, and all kinds of contact are almost unavoidable. Among modern Diaspora Jews, therefore, we find all possible positions and attitudes towards the non-Jews and the non-Jewish world, from that of total openness, reception and assimilation to that of complete rejection with the following isolation.

This was also the case in the Roman Empire. There is literary evidence (Philo, Josephus, Paul) and archaeological sources (synagogues, tombs etc.) pointing to a high degree of contact partly in the sense of »Hellenization« of Judaism and partly in the sense of Jewish apologetics and Jewish influence on the non-Jewish world. But there is also evidence - the Jewish struggles and revolts and the Rabbinic literature - pointing in the opposite direction of conflict and isolation.

We have found that, in many important respects, this situation of the Jews in the Diaspora was similar to that of the Jews in Palestine. In both parts of the Roman world, the Jews were involved in a tense and strained dialectic relationship with their non-Jewish fellow-citizens, and in both cases did this relationship produce significant events and important literature. As in other periods, the Jews in the Roman period formulated their beliefs and ideas, and reached their social positions by the way of various forms for dialectic interaction and communication with the non-Jewish world. They shaped their social, political, ethnic, religious and cultural identity in the process of exchange - direct and indirect, friendly and hostile - with the non-Jews.

Accordingly, in their relations with the non-Jewish world the Jews and Judaism were important parts of the on-going acculturation process in Hellenistic and Roman times. What we find, may be labeled »Hellenization«, »proselytization«, »acculturation« or »syncretism«. What I refer to, is the »dialectic« historical development in which Judaism was confronted by »Hellenistic« and »Roman« civilization. In this confrontation Judaism was both influenced by this civilization and actively reacting against it. In this process Judaism was partly transformed and partly became changed to totally new religions such as Christianity and Gnosticism. In both cases, however, Judaism strongly influenced the Western, Greco-Roman civilization - in a way similar to the other »Oriental« cultures and religions. In all these cases the »Oriental« cultures were more or less thoroughly »Hellenized«, »Westernized« or »Romanized«. And in all cases did they in turn strongly influence the same Western world.⁶³

⁶³ This is the so-called Oriental »counter-wave« against the Western expansionism, maintained by Cumont 1906/1929, cf. Bilde 1990.

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